T.C.
ISTANBUL KÜLTÜR UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

THE MONSTROUS OTHER IN CONTEMPORARY GOTHIC: BEN AS A FIGURE OF ABJECTION IN DORIS LESSING'S FICTION

Master of Arts Thesis by

Hassan Hadaoui
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Department: English Language and Literature
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Supervisor: Asst. Prof. Özlem Gülgün Güner

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July 2025

PLAGIARISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

Hassan Hadaoui

3/7/2025

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ÖZET

ÇAĞDAŞ GOTİKTE UCUBE ÖTEKİ: DORIS LESSING'İN KURGU ESERLERİNDE BİR AŞAĞILANMA FİGÜRÜ OLARAK BEN

Hassan Hadaoui

Bu tez, Doris Lessing'in *The Fifth Child* ve *Ben, in the World* adlı eserlerinde Ötekilik tasvirini inceler; Gotik'in birincil kaygısının artık ucube Öteki korkusu olmadığını, bunun yerine toplumun farklılıkları özümseyip kabul etme konusundaki etik başarısızlığının derin tehlikesi olduğunu savunur. Julia Kristeva'nın aşağılanma kavramının teorik çerçevelerini, Bracha Ettinger'in Matrissel Sınır Uzayını ve John Bowlby'nin bağlanma teorisini kullanarak Lessing'in anlatılarının ucubeliği ev içi alana yerleştirerek ve öteki figürü bir tehdit olarak değil, tanınma, ilgi ve duygusal bağlar arayan bir özne olarak çerçeveleyerek Gotik kurguya nasıl yeni bir bakış açısı getirdiğini araştırır. Ben'in iki romandaki karakterleri, normallik ve insanlık hakkındaki geleneksel görüşlere ve ayrıca ötekiliği inşa eden ailelere ve toplumsal rollere meydan okur. Bu çalışma romanları gelişmekte olan bir Gotik türe yerleştiriyor. Lessing'in eserleri, çağdaş Gotik kurguda Ötekiliği sosyal ve psikolojik bir çerçeve aracılığıyla daha da kanıtlıyor ve canavarın yalnızca dışsal bir figür değil, aynı zamanda toplumsal yapılardan kaynaklanan parçalanmış bir içsel durum olduğunu ortaya koyuyor. Korku, Öteki'nin varlığından değil, dünyanın kendisinden, kültürel normlarından ve farklılıkları damgalayan ve kabul etmeyi ve onaylamayı reddeden toplumsal yapılarından kaynaklanıyor.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Ötekilik, Gotik kurgu, aşağılık, Julia Kristeva, Bracha Ettinger, matrissel sınır-uzayı, bağlanma teorisi, ev içi Gotik, öznellik, ucubelik, yabancılaşma, Doris Lessing

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ABSTRACT

THE MONSTROUS OTHER IN CONTEMPORARY GOTHIC: BEN AS A FIGURE OF ABJECTION IN DORIS LESSING'S FICTION

Hassan Hadaoui

This thesis examines the portrayal of Otherness in Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*; it argues that the Gothic's primary concern is no longer the fear of the monstrous Other, but instead a profound danger of society's failure to absorb and accept differences. Using the theoretical frameworks of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, Bracha L. Ettinger's matrixial Borderspace, and John Bowlby's attachment theory to explore how Lessing's narratives introduce a new perspective of the Gothic fiction by locating monstrosity within the domestic sphere and framing the othered figure not as a threat but as a subject who seeks recognition, care and emotional connections. Ben's characters in the two novels challenge traditional views of normalcy and humanity, as well as the families and social roles that construct otherness. This study places the novels in an evolving Gothic genre. Lessing's works further demonstrate Otherness in contemporary Gothic fiction through a social and psychological framework, establishing that the monster is not only an external figure but also a fragmented internal condition resulting from social constructions. The horror is not arising from the presence of the Other, but of the society itself, its cultural norms and social structures that stigmatise and refuse to accept and acknowledge differences.

Keywords: Otherness, Gothic fiction, abjection, Julia Kristeva, Bracha Ettinger, matrixial borderspace, attachment theory, domestic Gothic, subjectivity, monstrosity, alienation, Doris Lessing.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis analyses two works by Doris Lessing, namely *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*, from the vantage point of Gothic fiction, focusing on themes of otherness, horror, and the breakdown of familial and social order that function as key motifs in the novels. While Lessing's works are not conventionally categorised as Gothic, they share Gothic key themes such as alienation, monstrosity, and the fear of the unknown. Moreover, the two novels address the concerns and anxieties of contemporary society by exploring the psychological and moral consequences of exclusion, marginalisation, and abjection. The analysis of *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World* will respectively demonstrate how Lessing's portrayal of her protagonist, Ben, reflects the Gothic tradition's recurring figure of the monstrous "Other" as a child and later in adulthood; his struggles for acceptance and recognition in society; and his endeavour to discovery his identity or "true self", which mirrors the Gothic themes of disorder and transgression.

The definition of Gothic in contemporary literature and culture is complex; scholars have introduced various and often conflicting interpretations, emphasising that the genre lacks a fixed definition and is constantly evolving. One common approach observes the genre's evolution as shifting from the traditions of Gothic fiction. In Elsa J. Radcliffe's book *Gothic Novels of the Twentieth Century: An Annotated Bibliography*, Radcliffe comments on this evolution of Gothic fiction. Radcliffe's work makes a strong association between the "Gothic" and the Medieval period, but argues that as the genre evolved, it diverged from this association. Stripped off of its original medieval connotations, it has begun to signify a grotesque, horrifying, and supernatural presence in fiction (Radcliffe 4). This flexibility has allowed Gothic literature to persist and evolve, integrating its core themes into various literary forms.

Similarly, Fred Botting notes, in his Book *Gothic*, that "… the diffusion of Gothic forms and figures over more than two centuries makes the definition of a homogeneous generic category exceptionally difficult" (Botting 14). This clarification adds to the notion of flexibility that illustrates the uniqueness of the genre. Botting perceives the Gothic genre as having the ability to transform and respond to change in culture, history, and aesthetics. This perspective aligns with what contemporary Gothic connotes; Gothic has adapted to reflect contemporary issues and social anxieties without abandoning its core themes.

Gothic fiction, as Catherine Spooner explains in her book, *Contemporary Gothic*, is not static, but constantly transforms through what she describes as a series of literary revivals. Moments where the earlier Gothic tradition is reimagined rather than repeated. She notes: "The notion of revival can be seen to imply a reappropriation and reinvention of previous forms rather than a straightforward repetition. Thus contemporary Gothic discourses can be viewed as relating to an earlier Gothic tradition while expressing at times an entirely different range of cultural agendas" (Spooner 12). The Gothic tradition is constantly evolving to adapt to the period to which it is restored. This ongoing evolution provides the framework through which Doris Lessing introduces her "monster" in *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*. Both of these novels engage with the Gothic tradition by reinterpreting monstrosity and the figure of the Other in a domestic sphere, reimagining these themes to reveal contemporary anxieties surrounding belonging, normalcy, and human identity.

The Fifth Child (1988) is the narrative of Harriet and David Lovatt, a conservative British couple who idealise the image of a large, happy family and always dream of building one. Their dream collapses with the arrival of their fifth child, Ben. His "abnormal" behaviour terrifies and shatters the family's bonds, destroying its harmony and peace, and excludes him from society. Ben is a depiction of a contemporary "monster", in the setting of a family house, where the horror and psychological fear stem from the struggle to tolerate the uncontrollable urges of a violent child, intolerable for his family and occupying an abject state.

In the sequel, *Ben, in the World* (2000), the narrative shifts towards Ben, an abandoned adult discovering a world indistinguishable to him with no place to call home. He is subjected to abuse and exploitation, and is denied recognition as a human being. Ben is constructed to become the ultimate Other, alienated from systems of culture, language, and intimacy. The novel explores the horror of the human condition, not through supernatural presence or uncanny, monstrous figures, but through Ben's ongoing struggle for belonging and recognition as a human being. Through Ben, Lessing presents a figure who is perceived as both the repulsive and the pitiable. To fully comprehend how such a figure comes into existence, it is essential to trace the origins and literary transformations of the Gothic genre and its association with otherness.

1.1 Poetics and Politics of "Gothic": A Chronological Analysis:

A wide range of connotations is associated with the term "Gothic", which typically refers to an aesthetic movement encompassing art, literature, and architecture. Various historical aspects rooted in European history have contributed to the coinage of the term "Gothic". The Gothic has always been associated with the Medieval Ages. The term Gothic is derived from "Goth", a name that refers to the Goths, a Germanic tribe that migrated to Southern Europe during what is known as "the Dark Ages". The close association of the Goths with the Dark Ages is reflected in the forms of art, literature, and architecture introduced from roughly the fifth to the tenth century, which are commonly referred to as Gothic.

Historians have overlooked some aspects of the history of the Goths' origins and culture, contributing to their dehumanisation and demonisation as outsiders. Disregarding their history resulted in them being stigmatised as a symbol of Barbarism and savagery and perceived as the reason the Roman Empire was brought down. Most of the surviving references of the Medieval Period are biased against the Goths. They are hostile towards or prejudiced against the Goths due to an association with the destruction of the Roman Empire. In the chapter titled "The Goths in Ancient History" as part of *The Cambridge History of the Gothic: Volume 1 - Gothic in the Long Eighteenth Century,* David M. Gwynn examines the views of Jordanes[1], offering a more in-depth discussion that challenges the typical perspective of other scholars of his time who considers the Goths only as outsiders.

According to Gwynn, most texts that survived the Gothic period were not written by the Germanic tribes themselves, but by Latin and Greek authors, who interpreted the Goths as "antithetical to civilisation." The Goths are only viewed as outsiders, and their voice is not represented objectively by historians, except for the Gothic Historian Jordanes (Wright and Townshend 24). This lack of representation suggests that, as nomadic tribes, they did not place much significance on recording history. The study of the Goths' history and origins is problematic even for Jordanes, who attempts to provide an objective and non-biased approach to the Goths' history. He explores

[1] Jordanes is a Sixth-Century historian of the Eastern Roman Empire, who is known for his interest in Gothic history and culture, and he is widely believed to have Gothic roots.

different elements of their cultural origins and voiced opinions on them without adapting the typical analysis that frames them solely as mere outsiders.

Gwynn traces the historical roots of the Goths through two approaches: one focuses on mythological and religious aspects, and the other on geographic and historical criteria related to their migration routes. Jordanes analyses the Biblical references to the sons of Noah from *The Book of Genesis*, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and supports the theory that the Goths are considered to be the descendants of the son of Japheth (26). According to Biblical historicisation, after the Flood, the sons of Japheth migrated to Northern Europe, which led to the claim that they were related to the Goths. Scholarly thought during the Gothic invasions was primarily shaped by fear. The association made by scholars to "Magog" is based on the "Goths" portrayal as fierce warriors by their enemies. *The Old Testament* prophecy of the end times is the basis for the claimed connection between the Goths and Magog. The prophecy states that the world will end with a war led by Gog from the land of Magog, bringing death and destruction. For this sole reason, these Germanic tribes were dehumanised as the enemy of God and an ill omen to the end of the world, providing sufficient justification for the European city-states of the twelfth century to unite against them and prepare for Armageddon[2].

Similarly, Muslim scholars during the Abbasid Caliphate period framed the Mongol invasion in apocalyptic terms, such as the association of the Goths with the Biblical Magog's prophecy. According to Jean-Pierre Filiu in his book *Apocalypse in Islam*, the Abbasids believe that the fall of Baghdad to the Mongols in 1258 and the murder of the Caliphate are linked to the Gog and Magog prophecy from the *Quran* (105). In a manner analogous to how Europeans regarded the emergence of the Goths in Europe as the end of the Classical period, a time considered one of excellent knowledge and prosperity, Muslims likewise perceived what they believed to be a fall of civilisation: The Abbasid period (eighth to fourteenth century), often considered the Golden Age of Islam spanned roughly from the Eighth to the Fourteenth century. Muslims shared

[2] The term "Armageddon" has come to symbolise a cataclysmic and apocalyptic event, often associated with the end of the world or the final battle between the forces of good and evil, in the Biblical narratives.

the Europeans' view of the Goths, that barbaric outsiders were the primary cause of their empire's decline, ending in the destruction of the House of Wisdom[3].

In his study of the Goths' history, Jordanes incorporates the religious claims but does not fully endorse them. On the one hand, he acknowledges the interpretations of their roots in Biblical narratives. On the other hand, he does not explicitly approve of the warning that has associated the Goths with the End Times. Jordanes attaches significance to the Goths' preeminence in European history and relates their rituals to those of the late Scandinavian sages. He traces their lineage in the geographical sense of history to a legendary place, "The Great Island of Scandza," located in the northern Ocean opposite the mouth of the River Vistula, between modern Poland and the Baltic Sea (Wright and Townshend 27). Observing his study, Jordanes' methods, in their religious, mythological, and historical research approaches, reinforce the pre-existence of otherness and prejudices in the views of Goths.

The association with religious prophecies that warn about an existential threat to humanity's potential annihilation led the Europeans to deeply dehumanise the Goths and perpetuate a belief that presented them as monstrous, savage, and uncivilised. Likewise, Jordanes also associates the Goths with supernatural and legendary roots, adding to their status as covert outsiders of a mysterious nature who pose a significant threat. The Europeans' first encounters with the Goths are of war, violence, and destruction, preserving a pre-existing threatening notion of the Goths. In reality, however, the Goths did not target the destruction of their neighbours. However, their goals and mindset towards wars varied as they engaged in these conflicts with divergent aims[4] from the typical imperial goals: territorial expansion and domination over neighbouring nations.

The immigration of the Goths is not only a matter of conquering of lands and settling in them. Some of those tribes are refugees of war. During the summer of 376 C.E., the Roman frontier faced the arrival of two tribes of Goths, the Tervingi and

[3] The House of Wisdom or the Grand Library of Baghdad was believed to be the greatest academic and intellectual centre of the Abbasid period, and one of the largest libraries in the world. The destruction of this library is marked as the end of the Abbasid period and the Islamic Golden Age.

[4] The Goths aim to discover new territories affected by population growth, and conflict with other tribes. They strive for more fertile lands, new trading routes, and access to valuable resources, which are common motivations for tribal movements during ancient times.

Greuthungi. Rather than seeking to invade the Roman Empire, various groups sought refuge in the Empire and requested approval to settle within its borders. Tervingi and Greuthungi were displaced once again from their homes by the Huns, a new threat from the East. Like the Goths, evidence of the Hun culture and history did not survive, and most of today's knowledge of them was passed through their rivals, the Romans and the Goths, who both viewed the Huns as alien and "inhuman" (Wright and Townshend 29). The various forms of cultural interactions of the Medieval period imply a shared otherness, which is not only linked to enmity or a violent history but also to the status of the outsider. The outsider stigma is enough to form a negative image, regardless of those so-called outsiders' goals. The Romans, Huns, Goths, and Muslims all perceived the "Other" as a threat, a view formed by their limited understanding of the opposing group's culture, history, and objectives.

The Goths' domination of Europe came to an end in the Iberian Peninsula (modern-day Spain and Portugal), which was the location of the last Goths kingdom, the Visigoths. In 710, after the death of Wittiza, the Visigoths' last king, one of his sons, Roderic II, requested aid from the Muslims to defeat his rivals. In the summer of 710, a Muslim army of Arabs and Berbers (Amazigh[5]) led by Tariq ibn Ziyad engaged in a brutal battle in Southern Spain. This battle resulted in the death of King Roderic II and the end of the Gothic rule in Spain. The Muslims established a new kingdom named Andalucía (Al-Andalus) (43). The rise and decline of the Goths imply a broad idea of how the fall of empires involves the existence of an "Other". All the above-mentioned historical examples follow a pattern of rise and fall. The Goths, Muslims, Europeans, and Asian Huns, at different points, perceived or were perceived as the "Other" and experienced threats as a result. Therefore, the history of the Goths can be understood as a history of otherness.

[5] The Amazigh are a diverse ethnic group of North Africa, who are considered to be the first indigenous people of modern day Morocco, Algeria and Libya. The reference to them as Berbers is another form of othering. According to Nicola Clarke on the naming of the Berbers or Amazigh "… 'Berber' is a problematic one, imposed upon a great diversity of peoples and languages by hostile observers…derived from the Latin barbarus (barbarian, itself derived from βάρβαρος in Greek) and associated with the verb barbara (to babble, speak nonsense) in Arabic" (Clarke 510). This indiscriminate reference to other populations is a way in which othering is form, and it usually associated with negative connotations.

The impact of this concept of the "Other"—the unfamiliar and often unaccepted outsider—can be traced back to the Goths' dominance in Europe. The Goths are not simply perceived as vulgar and savage Germanic tribes. There are different perceptions of how the people of Europe have seen the outsiders; the cultural integration of the Goths with their neighbouring European populations goes beyond the limits of hostility, and it is related to the formation of a new perspective of identity in Europe. In his article "The Goths in Ancient History", David M. Gwynn emphasises the significant role of the Goths in establishing the national identity and governmental structures of Europe. He reflects on the perspective of Sir William Temple, who sees a liberating movement in the clash between the Goths tribes and the people of the regions of present-day England and Germany:

> Reformation appeals to the Goths as symbols of freedom against Roman oppression helped to inspire the movement for German unification, since German nationalists saw the Gothic tradition as a means to develop a shared national identity. And in England the principle of representative government was attributed to the 'Gothic constitution' that came to Britain through the Anglo-Saxons…A generation later, after the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the Bill of Rights in 1689, Sir William Temple represented the Saxons as one of many Gothic nations swarming from the 'Northern Hive' of Scandza, bringing not only the foundations of English government but trial by juries and the institutions of feudal society. (Wright and Townshend 42)

During the Reformation and later, German nationalists viewed the Goths as symbols of resistance against Roman oppression. This perception helped inspire and justify the German unification movement in the nineteenth century. German nationalists saw the Gothic tradition as the means to establish a shared national identity, connecting contemporary Germans with a proud and independent historical past, as they perceived Gothic and its connection to the Germanic tribes as part of their heritage. As for the English people, Sir Temple regards "the English Bill of Rights" as a significant event that completely changed England's political and governmental system. The liberating role of the Goths has not been viewed positively during their period of control and influence over England, as they are thought of by historians with prejudices, as previously mentioned in the first section of this chapter.

The Goths' impact has completely changed Europe's political sphere — including that of Britain — albeit in an indirect manner, into a deeper understanding of the perception of individuality and to establish a national identity. According to David Hume, as discussed by Lotte Jensen in the introduction of his book *The Roots of Nationalism,* national identity is based on cultural differences. National identities are adaptable; they emerge from several interactions among different groups of people.

Consistency in cultural customs and behaviours increases with the alignment of language, nation, and state. Rather than being influenced by climate conditions, national identity is determined by how each person imitates the actions of others (Jensen 10). In this sense, the presence of an Other contributes to the construction of both societies' individual and collective identities. The conflict that the Goths initiated in Europe changed not only the demographics of the land but also how the concept of identity and nationality is viewed among those populations. This notion of otherness has shaped the literary scene and later influenced what is now known as Gothic literature, from the 18th to the 19th centuries and into the contemporary Gothic novel.

The emergence of the Gothic novel as a separate literary genre can be traced back to the writings of Horace Walpole. In 1765, Walpole introduced *The Castle of Otranto* as "A Gothic Story" on the title page of the first edition, which is considered part of the so-called Early Gothic period. The narrative of the Prince of Otranto has set an example for the typical Gothic novel of eighteenth-century fiction. It is considered the first novel to present the ideas of terror through the threat and fear of the unknown horror revolving around an ancient castle or house, reflecting on the otherness of the castle. It also introduces the figure of a dangerous tyrant with a mysterious family history and the damsel-in-distress waiting for an "outsider" or a hero to save her. The elements of Walpole's novel are still used in most contemporary works of Gothic fiction to evoke fear and horror in the readers. It is possible to examine the aspects of this fear and otherness by analysing the main themes of Walpole's novel. The influence that has led to the writing of *The Castle of Otranto* is closely related to the novel's focus on "Castles". Gothic architecture is one of the main inspirations for authors to shape their narratives in a way that has fascinated readers ever since. In the preface of the first edition of *The Castle of Otranto,* Walpole notes the following:

> I will detain the reader no longer, but to make one short remark. Though the machinery is invention, and the names of the actors imaginary, I cannot but believe that the groundwork of the story is founded on truth. The scene is undoubtedly laid in some real castle. The author seems frequently, without design, to describe particular parts. "The chamber," says he, "on the right hand;" "the door on the left hand;" "the distance from the chapel to Conrad's apartment:" these and other passages are strong presumptions that the author had some specific building in his eye. Curious persons, who have leisure to employ in such researches, may discover in the Italian writers the foundation on which our author has built. (5)

This explanation by Walpole indicates the significant role of architecture in the novel's plot. The detailed description of the castle suggests the influence of Gothic structures on the author's writing of this novel. The narrative's intense, eerie atmosphere is best

conveyed through a castle, precisely as described by the author, which evokes vivid imagery in the reader's mind. The fact that it is an ancient castle is significant, too, as it utilises the history of the architecture to build a connection between "the living" and "the dead" This connection is exhibited through family ancestry; an ancient castle must have a long chain of families who have lived in it, and the ownership of such a construction is commonly transferred among individuals through inheritance.

The Castle of Otranto does not merely present a Gothic castle as a part of the novel's setting; instead, the castle itself is observed as an "Othered" entity, exerting control over the characters and directing the narrative through its threatening, supernatural presence. Set in a medieval castle in Italy, the narrative begins with the death of Prince Conrad, the son of Manfred, the patriarch of the Otranto castle. On the day of Conrad's wedding, a gigantic helmet suddenly crushes him to death. Fearing the prophecy that threatens his family's rule over Otranto when the latest owner is too old to inhabit the castle, Manfred becomes obsessed with ensuring the continuation of his lineage. Manfred is shown to have authority over the other characters in the novel. He seeks to divorce his wife, Hippolita, and marry Isabella, the fiancée of his deceased son, Conrad, to secure a male successor. However, the family's castle dominates the novel's plot through the presence of a supernatural power introduced as a curse associated with the castle. The castle illustrates how inanimate structures convey the principles and desires of the late ancestral generation to the present generation, a desire to prolong their memory.

In Gothic literature, family legacy challenges human individuality and identity by absorbing them into the historical context of their societies. This aspect of Gothic literature links the past to the present through family and social relations. In *The Rise of the Gothic Novel*, Maggie Kilgour emphasises this link as follows: "The gothic is symptomatic of a nostalgia which idealises the medieval world as one of organic wholeness, in which individuals were defined as members of the 'body politic,' essentially bound by a symbolic system of analogies and correspondences to their families, societies, and the world around them" (Kilgour 11). This concept signifies the role of medieval history in Gothic fiction, as it idealised a sense of harmony where individuals are perceived as part of a larger entity governed by a patriarchal and feudal system. Early Gothic fiction is fascinated by this nostalgia for a "perfect" social

structure, yet it explores themes of disturbance of the order within these systems. The consequence of such disorder leads to chaos and horror.

Another Early Gothic example of otherness explored through the unknown is observed in *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Ann Radcliffe. Gothic fiction's fascination with otherness is reflected by its focus on unfamiliar constructions, such as ancient castles and the threatening tyrant figure. In Udolpho, Emily St. Aubert, the novel's "damsel in distress," experiences an intense psychological terror revolving around the Udolpho castle. The narrative represents otherness in various forms: The Lord of Udolpho, who aims to manipulate Emily and control her fate, the supernatural presence of the castle and the protagonist herself. There is an observed shift from the typical Gothic novel in Radcliffe's narrative; the fear of the unknown as an external threat of a ghostly force or the danger of a tyrannical figure is not the only threat, an intense internal conflict represents itself through the protagonist's struggle, which reinforces the Gothic's interest in identity and individuality.

Gothic fiction traditionally has a historical link to the past by exploring unresolved histories, mainly a family history, disturbed by an "other," which breaks the stability of the characters' world. Emily is moved from the safety of her home in France to the uncanny castle of Udolpho. For her, the castle is an "othered" entity of a foreign world, where she is faced with Count Montoni's authority and manipulation in an endeavour to take control of her inheritance. Emily is physically captive within the walls of the castle and mentally by a system of patriarchy and the mysterious source of the scenes of horror she witnesses in her stay at Udolpho. According to Linda Bayer-Berenbaum, the Gothic imagination expands reality by intensifying human perception and forcing characters to confront an external or internal Other. In *The Gothic Imagination: Expansion in Gothic Literature and Art*, she states:

> The perception of the expanded reality involves an expansion of consciousness. Sometimes external occurrences precipitate this heightened concentration, as when a person is so shocked by what he sees that he enters a state of complete awareness; at other times an initial heightened consciousness makes possible the detection of an external reality—such as the hovering presence of some strange apparition. Through heightened sensitivity and refined perception, the Gothic mind encounters a greater intensity or reacts to it. (Bayer-Berenbaum 15)

In Udolpho, Emily's perception of reality is extended outside her older self, the young girl who has never explored places or communicated with people beyond her community in a rural area of France. She believes she sees ghostly figures, shown in the novel as unsettling noises, and an unseen presence in the shadows. These events

are supernatural but are explained later in the novel as products of manipulation and deception; this resolution emphasises the emotional and psychological power of otherness. Otherness is observed from a deeply gendered perception in the novel. As Gothic fiction often portrays women as submissive and vulnerable individuals in a male-dominated world, it is expected that Emily will be subjected to the social expectations of eighteenth-century readers. However, she reclaims her agency and faces the dangers of Udolpho, represented by a patriarchal force that controls her.

To fully grasp how fear is presented in the Gothic through the concept of otherness, it is essential to observe the difference between horror and terror and their connection to the notion of the "other". The mechanism by which humans process horror and terror is multifaceted. To explore these concepts, it is essential to distinguish between the idea of horror and the integrated terror that follows it. These two concepts are combined and intertwined in Gothic fiction. One accurate analysis of the relationship between horror and terror is David Punter's article "Terror" from *The Handbook to Gothic Literature.* For Punter, the concept of terror has socio-political roots that are directly connected to the French Revolution and the series of massacres and public executions that occurred during that period, which is referred to as a "reign of terror"; this analysis of Punter connects the idea of terror to a "political abjection". In contrast, horror is concerned with disgust and fright related to the images of violence and gore (Mulvey-Roberts 235). The political integration in the concept of terror implies the collective role of the social Other in modelling the terror. The source of threat in this sense is the Other, an Other that is diverged by identity.

Matthew Lewis's novel *The Monk* (1796) provides a sound example of this otherness, which marks a transition from otherness concerns with supernatural events to a strong association with a physical being, a human being or a monster. The narrative of Ambrosio, with all his atrocious acts of corruption, incest, and abuse of power, embodies the realm of human fears; the abject state that the protagonist has is related to the disorder of the moral structure of the narrative's characters. In her book *The Power of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva associates the state of abjection with what disturbs one's identity:

> He who denies morality is not abject; there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the law—rebellious, liberating, and suicidal crime. Abjection, on the other hand, is immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles…a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you. (4)

Kriteva's language implies the social dilemma that this concept signifies in her study of the abject. The idea of abjection is deeply connected to feelings evoked by manipulative, decisive and betraying acts that disturb the "moral" order. This destabilisation is associated with identity and societal norms. It is essential to understand that abjection is not necessarily rooted in the act but in the individual's emotional and psychological link to what they perceive as highly sublime. The "actor" (the person responsible for the act) is also significant when the position they occupy is speaking, such as that of friends, family, or a societal institution, which amplifies the abjection. The more boundaries are crossed and values are violated, the stronger the state of abjection becomes and the more subjective it feels. *The Monk,* written at the end of the eighteenth century, combines the traditional Gothic elements of its period and those of the Romantic period of the nineteenth century. The integrated themes of individualism, intense emotions, and the sublime align with early Romantic ideals.

The dominance of otherness in Gothic narratives continued in nineteenth-century fiction, as well as Romantic and Victorian literature. The Other undertakes a new form of a physical being that embodies an ultimate Other linked to social fears and anxieties. Gothic fiction not only presents dark imagery of terror and horror, often by the presence of an alien or outsider, but also explores a threat from the unknown state of being. It highlights how the sole existence of a binary other disturbs the peace and harmony of the characters' lives within the Gothic narrative. This theme of disturbance in the moral and social order is related to the perceptions of purity and sublimity. Slavoj Žižek, in his book *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, examines Lacan's use of "the Thing" concept in psychoanalysis as follows: "The symbolic order is striving for a homeostatic balance, but there is in its kernel, at its very centre, some strange, traumatic element which cannot be symbolised, integrated into the symbolic order – the Thing" (Žižek 147). "The Thing" describes the horror resulting from what disrupts the symbolic order, the structure in which language and social norms reside.

The monstrous creation of Dr Victor Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) embodies this notion of "the Thing". The creature in Shelley's narrative is incomprehensible and defies the norms of what is a "human". It is an abject entity that

is physically repulsive and evokes an uncanny sensation. The creature exists in a place that humanity has not reached and has no means to understand through science or reason; it is beyond the symbolic order. The rejection of Frankenstein's "monster" represents an ultimate other. With the abundance of his creator and failure to belong, the creature faces an intense existential crisis. The otherness, in this sense, stems from the limitations in human knowledge. It is a human and nonhuman, a "man" and a "monster", both dead and alive, all of which challenge Victor's ignorance and his radical ambition to control the laws of nature. The monstrous other in Shelley's narrative is a force of destruction. However, it is not necessarily malicious. This archetype of a disordered yet dangerous being is one of the key themes that nineteenth-century Gothic is known for: a non-villainous protagonist.

The monstrous outsider occupying the role of a protagonist in Gothic fiction challenges the Hero archetype of early written prose, which is considered the basis of nineteenth-century and eighteenth-century novels. The first instances of a written work of fiction in a novelistic style close to the novel's structure have always presented an aristocratic protagonist[6]. The anti-hero archetype has also been utilised in Shakespeare's plays of sixteenth-century drama, such as *Richard III* (1592), where Shakespeare introduces a villainous protagonist (an anti-hero)[7]. According to Giles Whiteley in his article "Shakespeare, Influence and Appropriation" from *The Palgrave Handbook of Gothic Origins,* edited by Clive Bloom, Shakespeare's Richard influenced Gothic fiction protagonists: "In his scheming, his predation, his uncompromising use of violence, Richard foreshadows the gothic anti-hero" (Bloom 31). Whiteley suggests that Shakespeare has a significant influence on Gothic fiction.

In *Richard III*, Shakespeare focuses on presenting the villain's psyche, which is not the typical literary technique to deal with characters who are considered "evil", diverging from the previous forms of written prose. Richard Plantagenet, Duke of

[6] This archetype of an aristocratic "hero" can be seen in *The Death of Arthur* (*Le Morte d'Arthur*) by Sir Thomas Malory, published in 1485. The series of five books narrates the history of King Arthur legends, the Knights of the Round Table, and the Holy Grail. The archetypal hero that this series of books presents is a prince and the main themes are about the journey to the throne and the obstacles he faces.

Gloucester, has valid reasons for plotting against his brothers; he is greedily pursuing power, but at the same time, he desires respect and acceptance that he is deprived of because of his physical appearance. Richard is abjectified, a man perceived by others as an "unpleasant" and "deformed" creature. The impact is vividly represented in Dr Victor Frankenstein's creation, who is neither a hero nor entirely villainous, yet "othered" in every aspect of his existence.

Gothic protagonists' uncanny elements are conveyed in the narratives of Gothic novels through what they do not embody, specifically in terms of emotional stability and identity. Sigmund Freud argues in his theory of the uncanny (das Unheimliche, 'the unhomely') that "…this uncanny element is nothing new or strange, but something that was long familiar to the psyche and was estranged from it only through being repressed" (Freud 182). He established his theory by analysing another nineteenth-century Gothic fiction, a short story, *The Sandman* (1816), by E.T.A. Hoffmann. In his book, Freud formulates his theory by analysing Hoffmann's narrative, which delves into the human psyche of the protagonist, Nathanael, and mental disturbance. The uncanny figure of the automated doll evokes fear and anxiety for Nathanael, framing the fear of the Other as the unknown through this sensation. It is an "unhomely" doll with no "soul". The doll gains significance in the protagonist's mind, childhood, and family history. That is why the main fearful element in the novel is not the doll but the connection it has made between Coppelius and the Sandman, which is shaped by his trauma (what is repressed), not specifically a result of Coppelius's behaviour.

The components that build the atmosphere for horror and terror, such as castles or monsters, are formulated in the mind; the resolution is of the "self", not the "Other". The use of a Gothic narrative in Freud's theory implies a connection between psychoanalysis and the Gothic in their exploration of the Other, not in the physical sense of being, but in what resides in the psyche. The Gothic themes of repressed desires, incest, violence, existential crises, and the sublime are linked to a semiotic realm that, according to Julia Kristeva, disturbs the symbolic order, the order of things for the social structures and linguistic sense of meaning, "a state of abjection." Kristeva's describes the Abject as: "The corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part […] Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it

beckons to us and ends up engulfing us" (Kristeva 4). The uncanny nature of a once-living human being is a sound example of abjection. The threat to the body is related to an "error" in human perception of life. Death is binary to live, a corpse, being in between the two, exemplifies this ambiguity. That is the case for Olimpia, the "living" doll, and Frankenstein's creature.

The other, as a physical entity, is rendered differently in the Victorian period of Gothic literature. The other is not ultimately a monstrous figure, but what the monstrous traits represent for the novel's narrative. For instance, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, published in 1897, presents the figure of a "monster" yet of a hidden nature; the ancient vampire Dracula is uncanny as a human-like being with the characteristics of the dead. Dracula is undead, characterised by pale, cold skin, a lack of breath and heartbeat, and a connection to the grave, as he sleeps in a coffin. What is significant about Dracula is not his uncanny nature but what it hides: the repressed sexual anxieties of Victorian England, embodied in his eroticised bloodlust. Dracula seeks to "penetrate" his victims with his fangs, which resemble sexual intercourse. Bram's narrative focuses on female victims and the seduction of the Victorian, presumably "pure" virgin, Lucy Westenra, who is transformed into a blood-lustful vampire and killed with a stake to the heart, another penetrative action. These sexually implicit scenes display the horror of being conquered by the other and also an anxious perception of female sexual desires.

In the case of *Dracula*, the other is introduced as a foreign invader who aims to dominate their country through his wealth and power. This fear stems from the Victorian anxiety of reverse colonisation. Count Dracula is an Eastern European other who embodies the exotic and mysterious perception of the East for people of Victorian England. Edward Said's analysis of otherness towards those referred to as "Orient or Oriental" encompasses the populations of the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia, which were perceived as the Antithesis to European civilisation, culture, and identity. In his book *Orientalism*, Edward Said argues the following in terms of how identities are constructed: "The construction of identity - for identity, whether of Orient or Occident, France or Britain, while a repository of distinct collective experiences, is finally a construction - involves establishing opposites and "others" whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from "us" (Said 373). Said's argument suggests a significant role of differences and

how they are intensified to construct national identities. The existence of an "Other" in this sense is essential for this process, an opposing other that is significantly binary to "us." However, it is a matter of interpretation, not necessarily based on fixed truths.

The primary focus of Orientalism, as introduced in Said's book, is on the European or Western identity through the interpretation of Easterners (Orients) as the "Other." However, this construction is based on specific characteristics that are believed to be part of the cultural and historical traits of the East. In the case of *Dracula*, the Count character embodies the mysterious and exotic perception of the East, as well as the threatening aspects of the Eastern Other. In Bram Stoker's narrative, Dracula depicts the so-called corrupt nature of the Other. The vampire in the novel penetrates his victims as an act of dominance and conquest; the victims are transformed to become assets of his plot and are themselves no longer "human" or "English" but are of Dracula's nature (monstrous, corrupted, and "foreign").

Another significant Victorian Gothic novel is *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). Robert Louis Stevenson's narrative diverges from the notion of the "monster" as an external Other into a more modern take that observes monstrosity from within (an internal conflict). The novel represents the conflict between the self and the Other by exploring the duality of human nature and the depths of repressed desires. In the novel, the theme of a Doppelgänger exists for Dr Henry Jekyll, the protagonist. He is not actively present; the mystery behind him is the novel's central plot and is told from the perspective of those around him. The "Monster" in Dr Jekyll's narrative is Edward Hyde, a violent man portrayed as a foreign outsider. Hyde is introduced as a man with features that are not typically European, depicted as a short man, a "dwarfish" one, who has hairy arms and is a "troglodytic" (caveman-like). Moreover, Hyde is morally corrupted, follows primitive sexual desire and is a savage who acts instinctively and brutally towards others as an "animal." This description portrays a racial and morally othered man, antithetical to Dr Jekyll (the civilised Englishman). The narrative's resolution reveals that Dr Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are the same person.

In his book *The Double*, Otto Rank provides a psychoanalytical study of the Doppelgänger. Rank introduces it as a projection of the hidden and surpassed self; he states that the double is linked to fear and quilt: "The most prominent symptom of the forms which the double takes is a powerful consciousness of guilt which forces the

hero no longer to accept the responsibility for certain actions of his ego, but to place it upon another ego, a double, who is either personified by the devil himself or is created by making a diabolical pact" (Rank 103). The Double is formed through distancing the self from what the ego desires but does not have the means to acknowledge. An externalised version of the self that embodies all actions deemed "immoral" or "evil" is created to avoid this moral conflict. In Stevenson's narrative, Hyde is the Double for whom Jekyll expresses his deepest desires, emphasising the fragility and hypocrisy of Victorian society. The Other here is not a foreigner or a monster but a fragmented part of the "self".

In twentieth-century Gothic fiction, the "Other" shifts more heavily towards the internal threat of the unknown rather than the external one. A series of events have influenced today's contemporary literary scene: two world wars that have shaken the world and the perception of humanity, the emergence of psychoanalysis and the rapid development of technology, the collapse of colonial empires, and the establishment of new forms of governance and regimes. Catherine Spooner argues that contemporary Gothic fiction is impacted by two key factors: psychoanalysis and cinemas; she notes the following: "These two enormous historical shifts can scarcely be underestimated in the history of the Gothic: the one opened up new ways of telling tales of terror in a mass market medium, while the other enabled a profound shift not only in the ways Gothic narrative could be written but also in the ways that Gothic could be approached by literary criticism" (Spooner and Townshend 2). These historical and cultural shifts point to the fragility of the human identity and the new anxieties that have surfaced with modern civilisation.

Contemporary Gothic fiction of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has not abandoned its traditions, such as haunted houses or castles, monstrous figures, supernatural occurrences, and terrifying scenes of horror, which are part of its dark and grotesque aesthetic. However, it now focuses more on the psychological, social and existential anxieties rooted in the human condition. Gothic narratives represent an internalised horror; the fear of the Other is not displayed mainly through the supernatural unknown in a physical or material sense but by the self, society, and memory. The Gothic Other evolves from an observable monster into a more complex representation of marginalisation, trauma, and repressed identity. In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison introduces a ghost who is not threatening the safety or identity of the

characters but rather is made to protect and guide them. Beloved provides Sethe and her community the power to face their past, heal their trauma, and achieve redemption. The character Beloved embodies a history of slavery and racial otherness that has shaped African American identity.

Similarly, in Shirley Jackson's *The Haunting of Hill House*, the protagonist, Eleanor, is the most precise representation of the Other. Her emotional fragility and social isolation suggest that the experiences in the house are the product of her traumatic past. Hilarie Ashton in her article ""I'll Come Back and Break Your Spell": Narrative Freedom and Genre in The Haunting of Hill House," argues the following: "The horror in the novel lies largely in the space between Eleanor's mind and the external world (and the people in it) rather than in the direct appearance of horrific things, and those more classically monstrous things that do appear are pretty clearly arbitrated by that open space" (Ashton 269). This implication of the mind as the source of horror gives the notion of otherness a new perception that sees the other not as part of the self but as essentially created by an error in the individual formation of identity and reality. The Ghost haunting the Hill House in this sense is symbolically Eleanor herself. This blurred line between reality and the imagination, distortions of the boundaries of the self and the Other, is a recurring theme in contemporary Gothic, in which otherness is introduced and discussed.

The concepts and themes of Gothic fiction and contemporary Gothic novels spread to new storytelling methods. TV Series like *Black Mirror* present otherness in the setting of a technologically advanced world. The other is a digital double of the self, an AI entity or resurrection, and the narrative still reflects modern anxieties of the digital age, themes of alienation, loss of agency, and marginalisation. In *Penny Dreadful*, the Gothic traditions are reimagined through the lens of contemporary social concerns. Victorian monsters are used in modern-day London to address issues of gender, addiction, and trauma. Similarly, the adaptation of *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James into the TV series *The Haunting of Bly Manor* mirrors the supernatural elements of the original ghost story to reflect modern concerns of identity and psychological notions of repression, grief and attachment.

Video games extend the Gothic tradition into an interactive experience, where players directly encounter imagery of fear, monstrosity, and the collapse of the self. *Silent Hill*, for instance, is heavily influenced by psychological horror. In the game,

the town changes shape corresponding to the external characters' trauma and guilt, and the monstrous figures symbolise an internalised Gothic Other. In contrast, *Bloodborne* engages players in a world based on Lovecraftian cosmic horror, where celestial, incomprehensible beings take the role of the Other in the physical sense. The Other here is existential, reflecting the fear of an unknown and massive universe that reminds humanity of its fragility. There are also examples of Gothic in Manga, such as Junji Ito's manga *Tomie,* which presents the Other through a monstrous feminine figure. Tomie seduces people around her (mostly in a school, a Japanese school setting), manipulating them into grotesque acts of obsession and murder. Her Otherness is reflected by her unknown supernatural power of regeneration to become immortal, corresponding to Gothic anxieties about the body, desire, and identity.

After exploring the evolution of Gothic otherness from the eighteenth-century focus on the supernatural to the various monstrous figures and their othered connotations of the Victorian Gothic of the nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century psychological fragmentation and existential dread, to the range of contemporary texts and media that adapted the Gothic traditions in today's contemporary literary discourse, the discussion now turns to the central focus of this thesis: Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* and its sequel, *Ben, in the World*. These novels align with the Gothic tradition by moving their narrative back to the domestic setting of the house (the Gothic of the eighteenth century). The Other is not supernatural or metaphorical but is a human who challenges a social structure of normalcy. In Lessing's novels, the monstrous figure is not a product of myths or fantasy but emerges through society's reaction to a child who defies norms. Through the character of Ben, Lessing creates a contemporary Gothic narrative in which the horror is directed not at the ghostly unknown or an eternal conflict in the mind but at difference itself: the persons and ideas that cannot fit into the norms of family, morality, or what is perceived as civilised by society.

Chapter 1: The Manifestation of Monstrosity: The Child "Other" in *The Fifth Child*

The concept of the "monster" is a phenomenon that exists in nearly every cultural and belief system, taking various forms and symbolic meanings that reflect cultural and social anxieties, as well as the fear of the "Other". To study the notion of "Monstrosity" and how it relates to human nature, it is essential to address the divergent aspects in which the monster construction is manifested in society. The abject state associated with the presence of a monstrosity is one of the dominant symbolic threats often embodied by the monster figure; therefore, to conduct a thorough analysis of the societal and family conditions that create the monster stigma, it is also essential to address the issue from the perspective of psychoanalysis.

The Fifth Child by Doris Lessing introduces the "monster" through a contemporary Gothic lens. In the novel, Lessing narrates the life of a newly married couple, Harriet and David Lovatt, who move into a new house and dream of a large, happy family. To achieve this goal, they choose for themselves a traditional lifestyle that reflects patriarchal social norms and religious beliefs. Their life is "perfect" until Harriet is pregnant with her fifth child, Ben, who is born "different" from the other children because of his assertive personality that is marked by psychological resistance, making him impossible to predict. The family struggles to interact with him and fears for the safety of the rest of their children, so they decide to separate and isolate him, but as the tension escalates, they make a desperate decision to abandon him in a rehabilitation institution. Harriet later reconsiders this choice and brings Ben back home, but they continue to face challenges in dealing with his "differences".

Lessing's "monster" is, in fact, a child. In one of her interviews from the book *Conversations,* titled: "Describing This Beautiful and Nasty Planet," she states that she has two recurring questions from her interviewers that she struggles to answer: "Two things I was fighting against in those interviews. One was that Ben was evil, when he is merely someone who's in the wrong place, because if he'd been in a forest somewhere 20,000 years ago he wouldn't be 'evil" at all'" (Lessing 235). Lessing challenges and provokes her readers by raising the question of the monstrous through the portrayal of a "child" whose perceived monstrosity is socially constructed and never presented as a biological fact. In response to the claim that Ben embodies "evil,"

Lessing rejects the idea that a child can be inherently malicious, emphasising that, in a different historical or environmental context, Ben would not be perceived as "evil".

The second question that Lessing struggles with is: "What is this book [The Fifth Child] supposed to be about. People instantly say. Well, it's about [Lessing answers them] I don't know what. Make it up—genetic discovery, or mutations" (235). Lessing does not try to place Ben within a simple moral binary of good and evil; instead highlights the complex condition of the Other. The narrative is not concluded in the discovery of a conventional "monstrous" figure, as commonly found in traditional Gothic literature; it is ambiguous about Ben's nature. In this sense, the novel encourages a deeper engagement with its complex themes, including family dynamics, societal norms, the nature of differences, and notions of Otherness.

Monstrosity and its association with the Other is one of the recurring themes in Gothic fiction, and there are several examples of the Other as a "monster." Novels such as Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and *Carmilla* by J. Sheridan Le Fanu all explore the "monster" as an outsider to the narrative's universe or the setting in which the narrative is taking place. The monster's introduction begins by distancing the monster, or "villain", from the other characters. Those villains usually have distinctive characteristics that none of the other characters in the novel share. In his book *Monsters: Evil Beings, Mythical Beasts, and All Manner of Imaginary Terrors*, David Gilmore comments on the role of a monster from the ancient world to the present day: "In the ancient world, monstrosities, monstra, are named from an admonition, *monitus*, because they point out something by signaling or symbolizing. Clearly, from the beginnings of recorded time, monsters have been part of a semiotic culture of divination, metaphors, messages, indications of deeper meaning or inspiration" (9). Gilmore presents a compelling perspective on the significance of monsters in human history and society.

Gilmore's comment suggests that monsters have served a deeper purpose for human beings throughout history and in humanity's collective consciousness, extending beyond their role as mere mythical creations or objects of terror. Given that the word "monstrosities" derives from the Latin word "monitus", it follows that monsters are cautions about and warnings against important issues in society. Moreover, throughout history, monsters have been employed as archetypes, metaphors, and symbols to represent more profound truths or meanings about the human condition by providing

platforms for exploring existential concerns, societal fears, and psychological complexities.

In Gothic fiction, monsters often symbolise social issues, psychological anxieties, or moral dilemmas that were significant at the time of these novels' publication. In addition to being terrifying creatures, the monsters in those narratives have a symbolic meaning that reflects the struggles and values of the culture from which they emerge. *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley is one of the best-known novels that portrays the "monster" in literature. In addition to being a physical symbol of horror, Victor Frankenstein's creation serves as a metaphor for human ambition, unrestrained technological advancements, and a challenge to the authority of God, as Dr. Frankenstein involves himself in the creation of life. The Creature serves as a powerful warning about the dangers of darkly ambitious scientific research and the moral implications of creating life.

The novel also addresses the complexity of "motherhood" and "fatherhood" in their social construction. The character Dracula in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* is portrayed as the height of evil, reflecting the corruption of Victorian society. The dread of what is foreign, the sexual repression and the breakdown of conventional values are only a few of the concerns of Victorian society. Finally, there is the archetype of a monster in *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.* Through the personas presented in the novella, Robert Louis Stevenson explores the duality inherent in human nature. Hyde is a metaphor for Jekyll's suppressed urges and "evil" tendencies, which he unleashes with a potion. The horrific metamorphosis of Hyde represents the inner turmoil that results from repressing human urges and "true nature".

In contemporary Western societies, the monster represents the antithesis of the "system" and the social contract of society. In *The Fifth Child,* Lessing introduces the reader to the Lovatt family, a highly conservative household. From the first meeting of the couple, Lessing describes them as firmly committed to patriarchal ideologies. Harriet, as a young adult, was not like other girls of her age: "Harriet, she was a virgin. 'A virgin now,' […] She had not thought of herself as a virgin, […] but rather as something like a present wrapped up in layers of deliciously pretty paper, to be given, with discretion, to the right person" (8), indicates that Harriet presents herself as a typical conservative Christian woman. She thinks of her marriage as the only way to explore her sexuality and views women as having a sublime and innocent nature that

needs a man to help appreciate their bodies. Her excitement for marriage and having her first sexual experience is shown in her description of her body: "wrapped up in layers of deliciously pretty paper" Harriet's perspective implies optimism and positive expectations about sex; she is waiting for someone to recognise and value her, however in this sense she limits her worth and role in the patriarchal family to her body.

As for David, he is a man who sees his relationships from a so-called patriarch position that he believes to hold: "David had had one long and difficult affair with a girl he was reluctantly in love with: she was what he did not want in a girl. They joked about the attraction between opposites. She joked that he thought of reforming her" (8). One may consider David's identity as very conventional in his approach to relationships; David pursues a romantic relationship with the girl he had an affair with, despite his reluctance and realisation that she does not gratify his desires as a partner. His pursuit of such a relationship illustrates his compliance with patriarchal prescriptions of social conventions, even if it means dating a woman who may not share his ideals or desires.

In addition, David's desire to "construct" his partner and the reference to the "attraction between opposites" refer to traditional gender dynamics in which David believes he has the power to construct and control his partner, constructing her into the typical housewife that can raise a family according to his patriarchal and conservative beliefs. Those beliefs are consistent with conventional gender norms, which hold that a man should have full authority and control over his female partner. David's vision of this suitable spouse consistently follows the rules prescribed to him by others to sustain his place as a "man" in society.

David and Harriet's perspectives on marriage and family, along with their high expectations of a perfect family, are the primary reasons for their rejection and frustration towards their fifth child, Ben, whom they perceive as "different" and "abnormal". The complex feelings that they are dealing with in their relationship with Ben are understood through Julia Kristeva's theory of Abjection from her Book, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*: "The abject has only one quality of the object—that of being opposed to I" (1). According to Kristeva's theory, ideas and objects that are considered socially or psychologically repulsive tend to threaten one's sense of self and identity. The "I" represents the "self", and the "Abject" represents what is regarded as opposing and disturbing to the self and must be expelled from it,

to prevent any threat to identity. In Doris Lessing's novel, the Lovatt family's circumstances are strongly related to the concept of the Abject. Through a close reading of the novel, this chapter explores the multifaceted aspects of abjection as embodied in the portrayal of Ben, the "monster child," who occupies the outsider's position within his family.

2.1 The "Monster" Child: The Mother's Struggle, the Father's Rejection:

From the very beginning of *The Fifth Child,* there is a strong use of dehumanising "terminology" against Ben. The novel portrays a big, happy family in the patriarchal and traditional sense of gender roles; the woman in this context bears the responsibility of taking care of the children, while the men are primarily concerned with housing and financial matters. The Lovatt family is a sound example of this model of the "perfect family". The description of Ben as an Other, even before he is born into this world, is a strong example of the "terminology" that is used by the characters throughout the novel; Harriet has a difficult time carrying infant Ben, as he has extraordinary strength that she could not tolerate without the use of sedatives: "If a dose of some sedative kept the enemy—so she now thought of this savage thing inside her—quiet for an hour, then she made the most of the time, and slept, grabbing sleep to her, holding it, drinking it, before she leaped out of bed as it woke with a heave and a stretch that made her feel sick" (39).

The feelings Harriet experiences during her pregnancy are the typical feelings of anguish and pain that most women experience through their labour or that women face through the complications of the infant's progression period. However, her description and wording of her emotions are vigorous, and they exhibit feelings that extend beyond the biological aspects of carrying an infant or giving birth to one. The reference to her unborn child as a "savage thing" is not simply an exaggeration of the level of pain she experiences. The use of the term "savagery" is politically charged and usually used to stigmatise individuals or groups as the "uncivilised" Other, a so-framed individual who lacks the ability to be well integrated with what is considered to be socially apt and politically advanced.

From the beginning of her pregnancy, Harriet perceives Ben as fundamentally different from her other children. She experience is marked by pain and fear, leading to emotional estrangement. Harriet is unable to relate to Ben as her child, perceives

him as a foreign object invading her body, and later her family. Moreover, she articulates a profound sense of horror towards the unknown, a dangerous presence that she needs protection from. The threat is a "thing", an inhuman "enemy" that takes shape within her body, forcing her to take sedatives to temporarily tolerate the pain and proceed with her daily domestic responsibilities.

The "savage" is another reference to the Other in her speech, which is odd to use when speaking of an infant, which is a way to avoid moral responsibility and justify hostility towards the Other in the context of tribal violence. According to Freud in *Totem and Taboo*, certain taboos are rooted in repressed hostility, even among so-called "savage" or "primitive" societies. As he notes, "We may be inclined to suppose that savage and half-savage races are guilty of uninhibited and ruthless cruelty towards their totem and taboo enemies […] even in their case the killing of a man is governed by a number of observances which are included among the usages of taboo" (42). Freud suggests that acts of violence, particularly those that transgress social or symbolic norms, are not arbitrary; they are complex and psychologically significant. In Harriet's case, the tension in her relationship with Ben suggests a maternal taboo. She distances herself from the role of the loving mother due to her fear and discomfort toward her child, whom she perceives as the Other. Her reaction reflects the deep psychological conflict Freud associates with taboo.

Harriet's perception of Ben as a "savage enemy" is not driven solely by hatred or fear of his unfamiliar presence in the womb. It reflects a deeper psychological and moral conflict: a transgression of the maternal role that needs justification. In his theory of the taboo, Freud observes that even in primitive tribes, acts of violence or transgression are accompanied by conflicting feelings of remorse and admiration. He notes: "The impulses which they express towards an enemy are not solely hostile ones. They are also manifestations of remorse, of admiration for the enemy, and of a bad conscience for having killed him" (45). Although she perceives him as an enemy, her reaction is not driven by hate or hostility towards him; her rejection is linked to a feeling of guilt and confusion, aligning with the deep emotional conflict Freud identifies in his discussion. Her affection for him is interpreted as a complex mixture of feelings, including fear of his strength and the emotional guilt of her rejection, which suggests a more profound moral dilemma. The above passage foreshadows Harriet's internal conflict and the hostile family dynamics that Ben will experience.

The intensity of the words reaches its peak as Harriet finally gives birth to Ben. After enduring long suffering, Harriet is about to give birth to her fifth child. However, she endures a new feeling of pain that is more extreme in her pregnancy with Ben, which surfaces: "Phantoms and chimeras inhabited her brain. She would think, When the scientists make experiments, welding two kinds of animal together, of different sizes, then I suppose this is what the poor mother feels" (40). The unsettling emotions stimulate her mind to create the most hideous and disturbing images she could think of. The images that she produces stem from her knowledge of supernatural creatures and scientific theories. These are desperate efforts to comprehend her current state.

Harriot's experience as she becomes closer to her delivery date is a psychological manifestation of what Noel Carroll refers to as "art horror". In his book *The Philosophy of Horror*, Carroll describes a form of horrific metonymy that is not limited to monsters with grotesque appearances, but a broad connotation of use that has to do with the indifferent nature of the creature: "Horrific metonymy is a means of emphasising the impure and disgusting nature of the creature…by associating said being with objects and entities that are already reviled: body parts, vermin, skeletons, and all manner of filth" (52). Her lack of knowledge about what she faces leads her to visualise the worst images that may not possibly exist as part of tangible reality. Her pregnancy with Ben is not her first but her fifth, which adds an extra layer of obscurity to her condition. Carroll explains that horror is imagined and visualised through a horrific metonymy that magnifies the fear evoked by a creature that is perceived as impure and repulsive (52).

Going into labour, Harriet begins to picture a fusion between different types of supernatural creatures that are known for being terrifying or disturbing. The chimaera is a supernatural being from Greek mythology that is said to have parts of different animals; its sculpture in ancient Greece usually presents the body of a lion and the head of a goat. It also has a tail that ends with a snake head. Her visualisation is both a fusion and a magnification of what she believes to be an "alien" or a "monster" that resides in her womb. She then starts to imagine other combinations of animals: "She imagined pathetic botched creatures, horribly real to her…a lion and a dog; a great cart horse and a little donkey; a tiger and a goat. Sometimes she believed hooves were cutting her tender inside flesh, sometimes claws" (40). These animals of hybrid nature are not random "disgusting" images of two creatures merging into each other.

In this passage, the profound and paradoxical character of childbirth is emphasised, and it is portrayed as a moment of transformation and ambiguity. There is a pattern of opposing symbols that these animals are socially associated with: the danger of the lion and the loyalty of the dog, the weakness of the donkey and the massive power of a cart horse, and finally, the predatory of the tiger and vulnerability of the goat, all of which implies a mental conflict intensifying Harriet's physical pain.

The process of giving birth is part of Kristeva's discussion of abjection, as she views this natural human procedure as part of the horror vision of a primal narcissistic wound that has to do with the distinction between symbolic and semiotic psychological states of development that relate suffering and horror to a form of representation connected to a vision. She states in her analysis of this idea that: "Giving birth: the height of bloodshed and life, scorching moment of hesitation (between inside and outside, ego and other, life and death), horror and beauty, sexuality and the blunt negation of the sexual" (Kristeva 155). Kristeva notes the complexities of the maternal experience and the fundamental forces at work within it by exploring binary oppositions, such as life and death, self and other, and safety and horror. Similarly, Lessing depicts Harriet's labour pain using the imagery of the Chimaera and the animals with opposing symbolic significations, reflecting the psychological conflict of her experience.

These images of horror in Harriet's thoughts suggest her fear of her role as a mother for this child, as she has already experienced an "abnormal" pregnancy that tortures her physically and mentally, increasing the anxiety towards the "alien object" inside her womb. Harriet's vision of "hooves cutting her tender flesh" illustrates the impact of the physical and psychological pain endured during the whole experience of childbearing, which, in this sense, labels Ben as an outsider to the family. The abject, as introduced in Kristeva's writings, is present in the case of Harriet and associated with the deep psychological and existential complex of the maternal experience. This traumatic experience affects Harriet's relationship with her child, Ben, and she forsakes him as the Other that will be rejected and perceived as the main reason for the destruction of the Lovatt family and the life they have considered to be perfect.

The agony Harriet experiences in her delivery is an example of "Poena Magna". The Latin concept of "poena" is used to describe a state of "great punishment", a substantial or harsh form of punishment for major transgressions or

crimes (Poena, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*). Ben is Harriet's fifth child, and she has tremendous physical pain during her pregnancy. It is possible to see Harriet's pregnancy and the birth of her fifth child, Ben, as a metaphor for the disruptive and destructive experiences that mothers often face. It is possible to compare Harriet's experiences and Greek mythical tales where characters, often gods, undergo extreme punishment or misery. Harriet's pregnancy, for instance, may be compared to the torments of mythological characters such as Sisyphus[8], who was sentenced to roll a rock uphill indefinitely as retribution for his arrogance, or Prometheus[9], whom the gods punished for his defiance. Harriet's delivery, in this sense, is a form of "Poena Magna". The themes of resilience and the ability of people to persevere in the face of hardships are highlighted by Harriet's struggle to find meaning and purpose despite her suffering, much as legendary heroes at the end of their tales find a resolution to their conflicts.

In Christian theology, there is a similar concept to "Poena Magna"; sins are defined as disobedience to God's will and have grave repercussions, such as the potential for everlasting damnation and spiritual estrangement from God. Some Christian doctrines heavily emphasise the concept of hell, which is frequently portrayed as an area of perpetual torment, especially in the context of specific denominations or theological traditions. It is essential to note that Christian theology also places a strong emphasis on the concepts of grace, forgiveness, and redemption. The concept of "Poena Magna" emphasises the gravity of sin and the potential consequences of disobeying God's will. However, it is parallel to the belief in God's mercy and the prospect of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

Harriet is a devoted Christian who believes in the religious concept of a "fruitful marriage" and the significant role of women in bearing and raising multiple children.

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[8] According to Greek mythology, Ephyra was founded and ruled by Sisyphus, also known as Sisyphos. He was a cunning despot who displayed his authority by killing guests. The gods were very incensed at this transgression of the holy hospitality custom. He was penalized for deceiving others, including twice pretending to be dead. The gods had him move a massive rock up a hill, but every time it got close to the top, it would roll back down, and this cycle would continue for all eternity (Stevenson).

[9] Both ancient and modern cultures discuss Prometheus's punishment for taking fire from Olympus and delivering it to humanity. Prometheus was sentenced to an eternity of anguish by Zeus, the king of the Olympian gods, for his sin. An eagle, the symbol of Zeus, was dispatched to devour Prometheus's liver while he was chained to a rock. The liver was believed to be the source of human emotions in ancient Greece. Then, in an unending loop, his liver would regrow overnight and be eaten again the next day. Prometheus was ultimately set free by the hero Heracles (Hesiod)

Such beliefs are mentioned in *the Book of Genesis*, where God commands Adam to increase in number and fill the earth with believers (Genesis 1:28, *NIV*). The reference to women in this command as a "Fruitful Vine" (Psalm 128:3–4, *NIV*) indicates for Harriet a "divine role" of women, not only one of social responsibility. This theological perspective aligns with Saint Thomas Aquinas's concept of *poena*, as discussed by Nikolaus Breiner in his article "Punishment and Satisfaction in Aquinas's Account of the Atonement: A Reply to Stump". Breiner discusses Aquinas's views of punishment and justice, where (poena) demonstrates God's justice and mercy working in harmony and unity for the purpose of redemption and satisfaction (Breiner 251). The connection between the severe punishment of pregnancy that Harriet feels and the reward embodied in her "fruit" or child is observed to be parallel to Saint Thomas Aquinas's view of the "Poena", reflecting her interpretation of what she is going through.

The traditional Christian faith holds that, as shown in the Biblical story of Adam and Eve in *the book of Genesis*, "mankind" is fundamentally sinful, having fallen from grace as a result of their disobedience to God's will. Therefore, Human beings are subject to divine judgment and need retribution for their sins. Aquinas's viewpoint adds to this understanding. His beliefs imply that while punishment (Poena) is a reasonable consequence of sin and is inflicted upon people, it is also designed for the good of humanity; the penalty has a rehabilitative role, being not only penal but also seeking to promote restoration and healing. In Harriet's case, regardless of her faith, she does not relate to this concept as she has not yet recovered from the dire reality of her circumstances.

Her thoughts are only related to a supposed punishment she is receiving: "But another layer of thoughts, or feelings, ran deeper. She said to David, 'We are being punished, that's all…" (108). In contrast to the Christian views on punishment, which is also used as a form of retribution, Harriet believes that punishment never brings her any feeling of fulfilment or salvation; she is being punished. It seems to her that the suffering will never end and that there is no apparent reward. Her sense of hopelessness and disillusionment is amplified by her desperate need for an answer. Given her perception of punishment, Harriet desires to comprehend the justice and mercy of her suffering. She finds it difficult to reconcile her sense of pain with her faith in the goodness and justice of God.

It is possible to find a multilayered "abjectification" in Harriet's side of the relationship with Ben, which is characterised by a feeling of guilt and shame. She has experienced being in an internalised form of abjection when carrying the "monster" child in her womb. However, an extended emotional reaction carries on as she tries to manage taking care of this "abnormal" child, whose nature cannot be described in simple terms. In "'Sharing the Unsharable': Subjectivity and the Return of the Abject in Mothers of Physically Disabled Children" Clare Harvey and Carol Long examine the mother's feelings when dealing with a disabled child: "The process of subjectivity becomes particularly complicated for non-disabled mothers raising a disabled child…a woman might feel shame and guilt when she has a disabled baby, as she is confronted with the loss of the idealised (non-disabled) baby of her imagination" (Harvey 465). When placed within the social sphere of the mother-child relationship, abjection reflects the pressure on the mother, who deals with a social structure that stigmatises differences in their children. In Ben's case, he is perceived by others as having a "disability" or behavioural challenges, and with the abjectification evoked by his presence, Harriet experiences an abject state akin to that of encountering the unknown.

In Lessing's novel, shame and guilt are the most impactful themes that designate how Harriet, David, and the other children treat Ben. Harriet has always dreamed of building a perfect family. The children are essential for her and her husband, David, to establish this family; they want to build a large family with many children, "Six children at least" (11), the number they have had in mind since the beginning of their marriage. All of their dreams are shattered "because" of Ben; in addition to this new reality, Harriet is now being treated as an accomplice in this crime (Ben's existence). Harriet feels the pressure of motherhood that goes beyond the oppression and discrimination that women could experience in their role as primary caretakers of children, in a patriarchal social structure, especially in the first stages of development, "Harriet was wondering why she was always treated like a criminal. Ever since Ben was born it's been like this, she thought" (73). This emotional reaction to pressure is "rooted" in the role of women to preserve normalcy and perfection for the family, which is the main reason for her shame.

The other feeling that Harriet is affected by is guilt, which is closely connected to her rejection of Ben. Harriet sees Ben as a poor child who no one loves. She is worried about him and his future, but at the same time, she does not love him, "poor

Ben, whom no one could love. She certainly could not!" (52). The empathy that Harriet has for her son is out of shame for having delivered the baby in the first place, a "monster" that no one wants. She cannot perform the role of a loving mother and comply with the expected characteristics of motherhood: love, compassion, and sacrifice. Her guilt stems from this indefinite failure to conform to Ben's nature. This feeling increases when she is forced to abandon him, as David and the other members of their family had planned.

This image of guilt begins to manifest through Harriet's consistent denial that Ben is fundamentally different; she tries her best to avoid such a thought, desperately clinging to the idea that he is "A normal healthy fine baby." This denial of her is an attempt to get him to conform to the family, to normalise what they see as utterly alien to them. However, the first symbolic moment of deep maternal bonding between a mother and her child, the moment he receives his first ounce of milk from her breasts, is marked with violence and aggression. It is an unsettling and grotesque experience for Harriet. Ben's act is described not with the expected intimacy of such interaction: "Ben roared with rage, fastened like a leech to the other nipple, and sucked so hard she felt that her whole breast was disappearing down his throat. This time, she left him on the nipple until he ground his gums hard together and she cried out, pulling him away" (48). The feelings evoked by this violent interaction are not of intimacy but of horror and confusion for the mother. David's reaction addresses Ben's difference at a very early stage, but he only points at them: "He's extraordinary". His remark is not that of a supportive husband or an accepted father; he distances himself from Ben, placing the whole responsibility on Harriet.

Throughout the novel, however, she has referred to herself as a "criminal". Her "crime" is giving birth to Ben, but when they send him away, she confirms this stigmatisation. She does not defend herself for the so-called crimes that she has committed regarding Ben's "disability" but tries to negate her intent in abandoning him as an act against her wishes, "Now it seemed to her the truth, that everyone had silently condemned her. I have suffered a misfortune, she told herself; I haven't committed a crime" (73). Harriet believes that others are covertly criticising her for her "unfortunate" child's "disability". Social perceptions that associate disability with inadequacy or failure are the source of this self-indictment. Harriet adopts the perceived disapproval of everyone around her despite the absence of overt criticism, which worsens her guilt and shameful

feelings. Harriet accepts the reality of her circumstances, namely that she has not broken any "laws" but experiences a tragedy. This acceptance of hers is important because it shows that she understands that her child's condition is not her fault. Nonetheless, she struggles with her guilt and begins to doubt her value as a mother due to internalised stigma and social pressures.

Mothers' gain acceptance of their "unbearable" children through naming the abject and face the reality of their circumstances, which is what Harvey and Long suggest as conclusion of their study: "We have suggested that mothers attempt to purify the abject by naming it, rejecting their avoidance by facing the reality of their children's lives and demonstrating the power of their empathic concern to confront the powers of horror" (Harvey and Long 475). In this sense, to confront their horror, they must tolerate this abjection and attempt to share this feeling. At the beginning, Harriet seems to avoid facing the reality of Ben's "troubling" nature. However, as time passes, she starts to recognise and identify his difficulties. Even though Ben causes discomfort and feels rejected initially, Harriet realises just how crucial it is to acknowledge Ben for who he is, namely, her son. When she goes to the rehabilitation institution to bring Ben back home, the employees in the institution are aggressive with her, not letting her even see him. She replies with strong words of acknowledgement of Ben: "I am here to see my son Ben Lovatt" (74). She finally acknowledges Ben as part of her family. Harriet's compassionate love for Ben leads her on the path to acceptance.

Despite the contempt that society places on disabilities, she does not allow it to affect her bond with her child. Instead, she prioritises Ben's happiness and well-being, endorsing his rights and ensuring he receives the affection and care he needs, starting with his discharge from the institution. It is not an easy task, as even the nurses and doctor who should have been taking care of Ben while he is away do not support her decision; they try to push her away and prevent her from meeting Ben: "… 'When people dump their kids here, they don't come and see them after,' he said. 'You see, you don't understand at all,' said the girl. Harriet heard herself explode with "I'm sick of being told I don't understand…I'm Ben Lovatt's mother. Do you understand that?" (75). Harriet's experience with Ben represents an attempt to "share the unsharable." It is an experience that people have long considered a condition that only mothers can comprehend; even those who have closely interacted with children similar to Ben do not fully comprehend Harriet's circumstances. This perception of those emotions, a

mother's emotions towards her "abnormal" child, is related to the sublimity of women as the "bearer of life" and the belief that language does not have the means to describe such emotions.

By acknowledging her role as a mother in saving Ben, she does not confirm the stereotypical action that mothers could take, as this abandonment is presented in the novel as an irreversible decision. She connects in solidarity with other mothers who go through similar struggles. By being transparent and honest, she challenges social preconceptions of disabilities and shifts the narrative surrounding parenting while fostering empathy and compassion. In this sense, she could briefly share the "unshakable" abject or at least realise that there are mothers who are experiencing a similar form of abjection.

The rest of the Lovatt family's reaction is aggressive, and they bluntly reject Ben, as they do not allow Ben the chance to learn and develop as a member of the family; they exclude him. David, his father, is not hesitant to abandon Ben. Harriet is concerned with how David is tackling the situation with Ben: "David, the good father, hardly touched him" (52). "He is a good father", yet he cannot bond with Ben. Harriet wants to believe that her husband is still the loving father that she believes him to be. For her, to reject Ben is not a crime; her justification indicates that Ben is beyond what David can offer as a father. Harriet's illusion of David as a "good father" suggests her strong bond to the concept of family and her belief in a motherly role, "responsible" for keeping the family intact.

Harriet distances herself from this broken father-son relationship, choosing not to directly intervene. She tries to avoid the issue or minimise it. David is also frustrated by her behaviour: "… 'A normal healthy fine baby,' said Harriet, bitter, quoting the hospital. David was silent: it was this anger, this bitterness in her that he could not handle" (48). As this quotation suggests, David is incapable of dealing with Harriet, as he is silent when facing her rage and hatred. David's inability to embrace Harriet's "bitterness" and anger reflects the damage Ben's existence has caused to their relationship. This emotional disconnection between the couple is intensified by their avoidance of the topic of how "different" Ben is. David finds it difficult to comprehend or relate to Harriet's reaction, which makes it challenging for him to provide her with the emotional support she needs. His lack of words and turn into silence imply an absence of intimacy in their relationship.

David does not acknowledge Ben as his son, and there is a barrier between them: “This new baby had not yet shown signs of independent life, but now David felt a jolt under his hand, quite a hard movement. ‘Can you be further along than you thought?’ Once more he felt the thrust, and could not believe it” (34). The use of the word “independence” in this context foreshadows David’s struggle to establish a paternal role in Ben’s life. Their power dynamics are challenging for David to understand; his not-yet-born child is strong in a way that will be impossible for him to handle in the future. In her book *Subjectivity Without Subjects: From Abject Fathers to Desiring Mothers*, Kelly Oliver discusses the following: “In order for the father-son relationship to be one of mutual recognition, the father must sacrifice his absolute authority so that the son might also participate in it” (27). For Oliver, there has to be a form of paternal authority that he can share with his son to establish mutual recognition. The issue with Ben is that David’s authority is lacking, and this reality is revealed from the beginning as a rejection of a son who has not yet arrived at his house; therefore, David distances himself from Ben as this interaction disturbs his identity as a father. David’s lack of tolerance reflects his inability to engage with his son’s otherness. It shows a neglect of paternal responsibility, as he leaves Harriet to cope with Ben entirely on her own.

Ben has extraordinary characteristics that David finds challenging to internalise, so instead of interacting with him as a father, and try to guide and discipline him, David attempts to dominate and alienate him: “They would have to make sure that he was in his room at mealtimes and when the children were downstairs with the adults. Family times, in short. Now Ben was almost always in his room, like a prisoner” (55). Mealtimes and family gatherings are typically times for family bonding and connection, yet the Lovatt family frequently isolates him during these times; it is a crucial decision that they have taken to keep their other children safe. Ben is essentially removed from the rest of the family through this separation, which also keeps him from engaging in these shared experiences. His room’s physical limitations give him a sense of restraint and imprisonment, similar to what a prisoner feels. Ben’s isolation has impacted him and his whole family. Ben and the other family members are anxious and fragmented due to this disturbance to the peace and harmony that usually define family life. It also deepens his parents’ feelings of guilt, frustration, and powerlessness,

as they are isolating Ben to ensure the safety of their other children and maintain peace at home.

The family does not initially fear Ben, as they still see him as a child. What evokes this feeling is what he might be capable of. These early concerns are later confirmed when Ben deliberately harms his youngest sibling, Paul. Ben's tendency for violence and the observed physical toughness that he displays reveal a lack of control over him and a troubling absence of emotional responsiveness. This is seen in his rough behaviour while his mother is breastfeeding him. In one disturbing scene, the nature of the family's fear becomes unmistakably clear: "They ran upstairs to find that Paul had put his hand in to Ben through the cot bars, and Ben had grabbed the hand and pulled Paul hard against the bars, bending the arm deliberately backwards. The two women freed Paul. They did not bother to scold Ben, who was crowing with pleasure and achievement. Paul's arm was badly sprained" (54). In this sense, Ben is shown to be restricted to his room, isolated from his siblings. He is placed in a cage and deprived of the basic social interactions necessary for healthy psychological development. The family decision not to scold Ben reveals their growing sense of helplessness and emotional detachment. He is treated more like an animal than a child, and there is no indication that Paul receives any explanation for his brother's behaviour.

Ben's violent behaviour, when he bends his brother's arm, shocks his family. This behaviour is a direct consequence of the emotional neglect, isolation, and dehumanisation inflicted on him. Ben is confined in his room, which has become a site of exclusion. The state of isolation in which Ben lives and his removal from the social sphere of the family align with Julia Kristeva's notion of the abject. She argues the necessity of expulsion of what disturbs the identity in order to maintain stability and order. Ben exists in a space between belonging and exclusion; he is not entirely accepted within the family, yet not completely abandoned either. The process of abjection is a collective act by the whole family. His response, "crowing with pleasure and achievement", is the consequence of this ongoing exclusion and the state of the abject he occupies. The patriarchal beliefs that the Lovetts' embrace the responsibility for discipline and order fall to the father. However, David distances himself from this parental role.

The father's role that David is "obligated" to perform is one of a patriarchal nature. He is a man who believes his authority must be absolute over his wife and

children. Oliver notes on the traditional role of the male patriarch, primarily that which stems from Christian beliefs that: "Real men are responsible men. Real men take responsibility, which brings with it paternal authority ordained by God, because real men are also godly men" (Oliver 6). For David, this role of a "godly man" that Oliver refers to is significant to his sense of self. His failure to fulfil this so-called "divine" role destabilises his masculine identity. David's response to the challenges posed by Ben is withdrawal from his paternal position.

This authority is not a product of any specific religion but has been part of the human condition for thousands of years. There are two arguments for the origin and structure of today's patriarchy: a traditionalist perspective and a feminist one, discussed in *The Creation of Patriarchy* by Gerda Lerner. The traditionalist sees the men's physical strength and aggressiveness as indicators of the traditional role of hunters and warriors, sustaining a sexual division of labour, while women's primary duty is childbearing, which is seen as necessary for the community's survival. Anthropological data, on the other hand, have shown that in many hunter-gatherer communities, women and children engage in gathering and small hunting tasks as the primary means of obtaining food, which challenges the notion of male dominance and conventional gender roles (Lerner 30). The origin of patriarchy, in this sense, has been strongly linked with a broader discussion on the biology of males and females that has been used to justify male dominance and also to picture how the early human settlements survived.

Feminist anthropologists have refuted the idea of universal male dominance and associated such claims with patriarchal biases. In the nineteenth century, scientific explanations of so-called "female inferiority" replaced religious ones, using Darwinian theories to justify women's exclusion from opportunities, referring to menstruation, menopause and pregnancy as "abnormalities". Feminist critics have debunked these scientific claims, exposing their flawed reasoning and lack of evidence (Lerner 31). Gerda Lerner also discusses the German sociologist and philosopher Friedrich Engels' views on male dominance and gender roles in a pre-civilisation period. Engels's theory is based on the idea that men as hunters in tribal communities led to male ownership of land, establishing private property and the necessity for monogamous families. It also takes control over female sexuality to secure heirs for their property. With the development of the state, the monogamous family evolved into the patriarchal family,

where women's household labour became private service, relegating them to the role of a "head servant" and excluding them from social production (Lerner 35).

In the case of today's patriarchal family, as seen in the Lovatt family, David views himself as the head of the family, and his wife, Harriet, and his children, excluding Ben, as his property. He does not consider Ben his son, not as a case of paternal dispossession, but as an error in the process of constructing his "ideal" family. Similarly, women's exclusion has been historically justified by appeals to biological differences and an assumed inferiority by nature. Nevertheless, Ben is not inferior in the same traits used to argue against women; he is physically strong, yet his physical advantage has not provided him with any state of "superiority." In this context, it is not a matter of certain physical or mental traits that have established patriarchy or stigmatise Ben as the "Other;" it is the dissimilarities that he exhibits that threaten the structure of normalcy to which the society believes an essential guarantee for their security and for the family to function correctly.

Ben, by his extraordinary "nature," represents a threat to his father's authority, undermining his patriarchal role as a father. He does not pose an immediate physical threat to David, at least in his current age. The danger is related to his identity as a male and the authority over the family. David rejects the premise that he is Ben's father; his act of isolating Ben is interpreted as an extra disciplinary measure intended to impose authority, which is insufficient and only drives Ben further away from the family. This reaction aligns with James W. Messerschmidt's views on what he refers to as Hegemonic Masculinity in his book *Hegemonic Masculinity Formulation, Reformulation, and Amplification*, where the father, in a patriarchal context, is expected to demonstrate masculine physical attributes. The son reacts with more feminine attributes: "The father demonstrated physical strength and superiority (culturally defined masculine qualities) while the son embodied physical weakness and inferiority (culturally defined feminine qualities)" (Messerschmidt 93). David believes that it is his role to establish harmony and stability in the family's gender roles, which he only considers functional through his authority.

This masculine authority is characterised by a superior feeling based on physical strength; the notion of this gender dynamics reflects a broad societal system that sees women as "inferior" and children as an extension of this "inferiority". Ben is expected to be weak and obedient, not to perform the agency that David assumes is exclusive to

him. Because Ben is born with unique physical attributes and behavioural patterns, it is difficult for David to handle and maintain a sense of superiority over him, which forces David to reaffirm his authority. These qualities in Ben-David's relationship are not what David had expected in his vision of the family he dreams of.

As Ben develops physically and mentally, David is anxious to sustain his image of power. On one occasion, he sees Ben accompanied by a group of "friends" who are his "gang" David wants to reaffirm that his still the "man of the house:" "David came back from work late, these days, and sometimes did not come at all […] He said, 'Clear that mess up.' They slowly got to their feet and cleared it up. He was a man: the man of the house" (114). Ben and "his gang" cleaned up the mess they had made, but this was insufficient authority for him to exert power and fulfil his paternal role; it lacked Ben's acknowledgement.

This reaction is the only proper way David knows to discipline and raise his child in the system of patriarchal ideology that he sees as proper. Michel Foucault suggests that the power struggle is associated with the question of identity. In his article "The Subject and Power", Foucault states: "This form of power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subject" (781). This struggle, for David, is part of the disturbance to his identity centred on the father's authority. Ben does not recognise his father's power, even if he acts upon his requests and orders; his obedience is out of fear of a stranger, not the form of acknowledgement that David wants to acquire or needs.

The "threat" that occurred to David's belief system as a father makes him cast Ben into a state of abjection. Within a patriarchal structure, Ben challenges the role of his father in society, as well as the broader "rule of the father" in Kristeva's notion of the abject; David feels betrayed by his son through this breach of authority. Kristeva refers to betrayal in her study of abjection as "a friend who stabs you" (Kristeva 4). David does not acknowledge Ben as his son, as the abjection is unbearable for him, and the rejection is how he withstands this abjection: "… 'He's our child.' 'No, he's not,' said David, finally. 'Well, he certainly isn't mine.' They were in the living-room. Children's voices rose sharp and distant from the dark winter garden. (69). This denial of paternity expressed by David in the previous passage signals a fracture in their

family relationship, marked by an ongoing failure to engage in a productive father/son connection that Ben, as a teenager, needs. Moreover, David's rejection is not a reaction to a rebellious teenager; the existence of a "different" child disrupts every aspect of the family structure for David, which is the primary source of abjection in this context and the reason for the collapse of his social role.

2.2 The "Monster" Construction and the Cultural Logic of Otherness:

In every social structure, the Other is interpreted through the culture and religious beliefs of the society. These interpretations share a common quality in their connection to a structure of a so-called "normal". The more divergent an individual is from their social structure, the more they are intensely marked by otherness, which encompasses racial, sexual, and national differences, as well as health and genetic conditions, such as disabilities. This social dilemma that these structures impose influences a variety of perceptions and concepts, one of which is Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's theory in his book *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*:

> The monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us. In its function as dialectical Other or third-term supplement, the monster is an incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond—of all those loci that are rhetorically placed as distant and distinct but originate Within. Any kind of alterity can be inscribed across (constructed through) the monstrous body, but for the most part monstrous difference tends to be cultural, political, racial, economic, sexual. (7)

Cohan's interpretation of the "monster" offers the foundation for a thorough analysis of the "monstrosity" from a viewpoint that is not defined by the appearances or behavioural traits that are culturally associated with the "monster" figure, but by addressing the question of normalcy and differences. Cohen's definition of the monster as "difference made flesh" emphasises the significant role of the "monster figure" as a physical representation of differences. By breaking social conventions and cultural norms, it blurs the line between the "familiar" and the "strange", the "self" and the "Other". Cohen acknowledges the variety of shapes by which monstrosity is constructed in society. By examining each form of monstrous figure or stigma, a shared complex issue of identity, otherness, and marginalisation arises. Monstrous creatures are frequently used metaphorically to represent societal fears, biases, and power dynamics. These differences are observed in the novel through the relations of Ben and his relatives, which are understood through a "hierarchy" of different forms of others.

The analogy that has been made between the Lovatt family children and their extended family children focuses on the differences; Children who resemble the

"ordinary" are at the top of this social pyramid, while those who are "different" are deemed outsiders or Others. In this stigmatised structure, Ben occupies the lowest tier of inferiority, with non-disabled children at the top and Amy, a girl with Down syndrome, positioned in the middle. Amy, who held the lowest position in the family before Ben's birth, finds herself elevated after his birth and the acknowledgement of his differences. In this context, she is not considered the lowest. In her perception, Harriet already harbours a negative perception of disabilities; she does not share her sister, Sarah's, belief that the poor financial situation she has with her husband William is due to their poor luck, but associates it with them having a "Mongol"[10] child.

The attention shifts away from Amy, the "abnormal" child, and turns towards Ben, the "monster" child. Amy appears to be a "normal" child, in contrast to Ben. This change is observed when Sarah compares both and favours Amy as a child; she enjoys her company: "That Ben gives me the creeps. He's like a goblin or a dwarf or something. I'd rather have poor Amy any day" (52). The resemblance of Ben to mythical beasts is a form of stigmatisation to extend his Otherness. He is an "alien" figure that cannot be explained and does not exist in formal reality. Amy has been the Other before Ben's birth: she is a "Mongol", a child of "another nation", one associated with brutality and danger, but when she is compared to Ben, she is not the Other; she is just a child. "Her head was too big, her body too squat, but she was full of love and kisses and everyone adored her" (61). Harriet's anxiety about her son Ben and his future is evident in her thoughts about how Amy is accepted by the family, while Ben is not. This increases the pressure placed on Harriet.

This dynamic reflects the tendency of society to associate humanity with specific indicators that are based on what it believes to be their "differences", with those who diverge from the norms most frequently facing marginalisation or being labelled "monstrous". Here, Amy's value as a human being and the level of social acceptance she receives are reevaluated because she is different from Ben's physical characteristics. Harriet's feelings and Ben's position in his family as the Other emphasise the destructive consequences of stigmatisation to human beings in their families and extended social marginalisation in their communities. The views that

[10] The term "Mongol child" refers to Down syndrome, which was historically referred to as "Mongolism" due to certain facial features resembling those of people from Mongolia.

Lessing presents in her novel signify the biases of society and the implications of these prejudices on the question of children's "normalcy".

A different aspect of Otherness presented in the novel is the role of science in shaping the social image of the outsider, particularly in cases involving children with disabilities or conditions of an "unidentifiable" nature. The "Outsider" stigma of a disabled child is not distinct from today's contemporary society represented in the novel. In *The Fifth Child*, this phenomenon manifests clearly in the social treatment of children with special needs. Harriet attempts to remove her son from the institution, and what she sees there is a sound representation of this discriminatory form of Othering towards children who are deemed "different":

> A baby like a comma, great lolling head on a stalk of a body […] then something like a stick insect, enormous bulging eyes among stiff fragilities that were limbs […] a small girl all blurred, her flesh guttering and melting […] a doll with chalky swollen limbs, its eyes wide and blank, like blue ponds, and its mouth open, showing a swollen little tongue. A lanky boy was skewed, one half of his body sliding from the other. A child seemed at first glance normal, but then Harriet saw there was no back to its head; it was all face, which seemed to scream at her. Rows of freaks, nearly all asleep, and all silent. They were literally drugged out of their minds. Well, nearly silent: there was a dreary sobbing from a cot that had its sides shielded with blankets. (76)

The children in the institution reveal a shocking reality for Harriet, described with the use of shocking figurative language, which highlights the children's physical "abnormalities" and "distinctions": they are children with a broad spectrum of medical conditions or disabilities, such as physical deformities, and cognitive issues. It eliminates assumptions about physical characteristics as "normal" or "abnormal" and emphasises the complexity of disability. How the children's physical attributes are presented designates their differences from the "ordinary".

Their deformed appearance and unusual characteristics reflect their alienation from the world of the "normal" and supplement the rejection they receive. Douglas C. Baynton, in his book *The Disability Studies Reader,* states the following regarding the otherness that children with disabilities face: "While disabled people can be considered one of the minority groups historically assigned inferior status and subjected to discrimination, disability has functioned for all such groups as a sign of and justification for inferiority" (Davis 18). The state of the child being labelled as having a disability is used to justify the acts of neglect, and the behaviour towards Ben's differences is part of this framework. This inferiority attached to individuals in society is related to the dehumanisation of the Other, according to Baynton. Therefore, being

inferior is a way that makes the disabled person or people who are associated with this group “less human”.

The children are perceived to be mostly silent and restless, with some of them seeming to be fully sedated and unconscious. Their state makes them more vulnerable to neglect and abuse in the institutional setting in which they are kept, as well as maintaining a condition where they are inactive and powerless. A variety of feelings are evoked by this setting for Harriet, such as feeling the horror of witnessing strong uncanny figures, the tension that is building as she moves towards the place where her son is being kept, and not knowing how bad his state is; and the pity she has for those children who are abandoned in inhuman conditions. Harriet’s response upon seeing the children is a reflection of both her developing understanding of the difficulties involved in raising a child with a “disability” or one who defies the norms, and her own emotions of discomfort and alienation. Moreover, she realises the future that her son will experience, left with the stigma of a “Monster child”.

Once Ben starts to interact with the children again following his discharge from the institution, he has an incident at school where he attacks and harms one of his peers. It is important to note that Ben’s violent acts are not the result of deliberate misbehaviour. Mrs Garner believes that he has too much energy that he cannot control, and that is the source of his violence; she is a woman who helps the family and has been observing the family’s struggle with Ben since the beginning. She tries to provide advice to the family, assisting them in understanding the dynamics of Ben’s behaviour. Harriet has to ensure that Ben is disciplined, or she cannot maintain a normal image of him in her community: “Now listen to me, Ben. If you ever, ever, ever hurt anyone again, you’ll have to go back there” (93). She threatens to abandon Ben again (return him to the institution), but it is not a genuine threat. However, her only means to assert control over him is by threatening him; she seeks to surpass his differences, for him to appear “normal”, and reduce his Otherness.

Harriet struggles to control Ben’s challenging behaviour and lack of self-control, which leaves her anxious about how he is perceived by others. She feels the need to construct an acceptable image of him both to survive and for her to be seen as a “good mother”. This response is an ongoing reaction of hers in the novel, seen in her questioning the nature of Ben to Mrs Garner: “Have you ever known a child like Ben before?” (92), which she avoids answering. However, when she faces the same

question with another community member, Dr Gilly, a specialist in cases similar to Ben's, expecting a reaffirmation of his assumed "differences," the answer offers her no satisfaction: "Dr. Gilly said, 'I'm going to come straight to the point, Mrs. Lovatt. The problem is not with Ben, but with you. You don't like him very much'…" (95). Harriet is not relieved by this answer and has the same feeling of accountability. She is to blame for Ben; he has always been her responsibility. She wants a way to escape this guilt and criminality by pushing this stigma on Ben. If he is not a human being, she is not responsible; he is not of her "creation", and she bears no "sin". Harriet's cries for help go unanswered, leaving her confused and distressed; the very people who are supposed to help, such as her husband, medical professionals, and educators, neglect their duties and responsibilities. This negligence intensifies Harriet's difficult circumstances and deepens her feelings of guilt.

Douglas C. Baynton explains this tendency for "normalcy"; he notes that being "normal" is not only being close to what is considered "ordinary" or "usual". It goes beyond that to place a high emphasis on characteristics such as intelligence and physical abilities. Baynton discusses this question of "normalcy" as an attempt to study the social reaction towards disabled children:

> Although normality ostensibly denoted the average, the usual, and the ordinary, in actual usage it functioned as an ideal and excluded only those defined as below average. 'Is the child normal?' was never a question that expressed fear about whether a child had above-average intelligence, motor skills, or beauty. Abnormal signified the subnormal. In the context of a pervasive belief that the tendency of the human race was to improve itself constantly, that barring something out of the ordinary humanity moved ever upward away from its animal origins and toward greater perfection, normality was implicitly defined as that which advanced progress (or at least did not impede it). Abnormality, conversely, was that which pulled humanity back toward its past, toward its animal origins (Davis 20).

Baynton demonstrates how the concept of normalcy is often idealised and associated with qualities that are considered to be outstanding or progressive. People are cast into a state of abjection when they disturb this idealised version of "normalcy", and distinctions from it tend to be viewed negatively and result in discrimination. Moreover, the concept of normalcy is used to exclude those who are perceived as imperfect or below average. Ben has an observable physical advantage that would have been to his benefit if he had received the guidance and support to express himself in a healthy way that integrates him into society.

The idealised views of normalcy also signal a fear of a reversed form of evolution, the idea of everlasting human progress and development. This idea is that evolution and

normalcy are inextricably intertwined, as they define the boundaries of human beings, and those deemed "normal" are seen as a deprivation for their societies. Baynton addresses this paradoxical structure through his analysis of children's normalcy: "Is the child normal?" a recurring question that Harriet asks and Ben is pressured by. Through this question, Baynton concludes that the "normal" is a form of "subnormal"; it disregards a child's actual development or health concerns. A struggle to achieve an unattainable version of humanity is structured to sustain the progress and prosperity of the human race, a myth of evolution that is never accomplished. Abnormality, on the other hand, is associated with regression or a return to more primitive stages, threatening the social structure that idealises "sameness" and fears "differences".

This pattern of exclusion reflects a tendency to marginalise individuals who defy the perceived norms of society. Steven A. Gelb attributes this tendency to what he terms "evolutionary anxiety", where a spectrum based on a so-called civilised model results in discrimination against those who are deemed to be less "evolved". In his article "Evolutionary Anxiety, Monstrosity, and the Birth of Normality" he states: "Darwin and other evolutionists argued that human civilization was a recent and fragile development and that persons who were not fully evolved still lived in advanced societies" (Dudley-marling79) These beliefs and their impact on the academic community built an anxious feeling for societies to maintain normalcy in an effort to establish more a "civilized human being". It has also impacted the societal condition of "abnormal" and "disabled" children. Such individuals tend to be discriminated against or marginalised, which serves to maintain the belief that a "normal" and more functional member of society is equal to a "worthy" of living and "valuable" human being for society.

Harriet's anxious response to Ben's increasingly violent tendencies during adolescence aligns with Gelb's theory; however, Ben destabilises her understanding of human nature. Her feelings shift into fear and existential dread; This fear is captured in her perception of Ben: "Compared with the raw and unfinished youths, he was a mature being. Finished. Complete. She felt she was looking, through him, at a race that reached its apex thousands and thousands of years before humanity, whatever that meant, took this stage" (119). In this moment, Harriet no longer perceives Ben as part of a shared humanity. The infant who once evoked repulsion becomes fascinating to her. Ben's extraordinary characteristics deepen her anxiety about how Ben's presence,

which threatens the boundaries of the human, will affect how he is perceived by society.

The Otherness that Ben is experiencing is systematic and stems from the position he occupies in his community, and the rejection of what he has become, a rebellious and uncontrollable teenager. This otherness in the novel is seen through the father-son power dynamics that Ben experiences, as well as the distinctions between "normal" and "abnormal" children. However, a more intense conflict begins to take shape when Ben interacts with society and faces a complex societal structure, outside the borders of his "home", that he is not equipped to deal with. According to Zygmunt Bauman, the social factors of Otherness deepen in parallel with the level of "differences" and "similarities". In his book *Liquid Modernity*, Bauman explains as follows:

> The aspect in which we are all alike is decidedly more significant and consequential than everything that sets us apart from one another; significant enough to outweigh the impact of the differences when it comes to taking a stand. And not that 'they' differ from us in every respect; but they differ in one respect which is more important than all the others, important enough to preclude a common stand and render genuine solidarity unlikely, whatever the similarities that make us alike. It is a typically either/or situation: the boundaries dividing 'us' from 'them' are clearly drawn and easy to spot, since the certificate of 'belonging' contains just one rubric, and the questionnaire which those applying for the identity card are required to fill in contains but one question and a 'yes or no' answer" (176).

Otherness is a social fact that exists in every society through a binary opposition between "Us" and "Them" that Bauman perceives as an essential boundary that draws communities together, forming the unity that advocates for the security of individuals. This stigmatisation simplifies individual experiences and complex identities into a radical choice based on fear of the other and their differences that threaten the community as a whole. This structure determines the position of people as insiders and outsiders, or "Others", based on a social construction out of their control. This quality of a community results in further division and exclusion for already marginalized and othered individuals.

In the novel, for Ben's family, the issue of belonging is a matter of discussion, when it comes to Ben's place in the family. This conflict foreshadows the position he will later occupy in a community, which is being a gang member. Ben's family does not acknowledge him as one of their own, and they send him to an institution to be abandoned there. The discussion that occurs on the day they decide to process this decision goes as follows: "Are you going to send us away, too?" (71). That is his sister,

Jane's reaction. There is no empathy towards Ben or fear for his safety. She is only a young child, but her reaction is out of the upbringing they had, her and the other children. Ben is never treated as their brother, so it is understandable for her to think only about herself and her siblings. She demonstrates a profound understanding of the situation, as a "child" is being sent away, and she is a child herself, highlighting the "similarities" between them; however, Ben is not the "same" as her. David answers her question: "… 'No, of course we aren't,' said David, sounding curt" (71). David answers the questions without any emotions towards Ben, but with fear for the children's feelings.

Finally, Luke explains to his siblings, emphasising the "differences": "They are sending Ben away because he isn't really one of us" (71). This expression implies the classification that occurs in the social sphere, which constructs a community through a focus and amplification of differences. Ben is just a child, like Luke, Paul and Helen; he has no idea what to change, how to become "more similar", and secure a position in the family. As for Ben, after all the mistreatment and rejection he has experienced with his family and at the institution, he eventually rejects them. "He kept his eyes on his father, who had betrayed him. Helen said, 'Hello, Ben.' Then Luke: 'Hello, Ben.' Then Jane. Not Paul, who was miserable that Ben at last said, 'Hello.' His eyes were moving from face to face: friend or foe?" (84). Ben's feelings are a mix of confusion and "betrayal." He loses his sense of security and safety.

Ben appears uncertain about his relationship with Helen, Luke, and Jane based on his reaction to their greetings. Since he has been "betrayed," he does not know whom to depend on and trust. Ben is uncertain who these individuals are, if they are friends or enemies, as seen by his inability to respond to Paul's welcome and his close examination of their emotions: "His eyes were moving from face to face" (84). He tries to determine if their intentions towards him are genuine, as he doubts the nature of their friendly greetings. This confrontation deepens Ben's alienation, marking the end of a fragile connection he has with his siblings. The execution and rejection that Ben experiences make him vulnerable to abuse and violence.

The tendency to adapt and survive forces Ben to confront any challenge he faces with violence. Ben's implementation of violence to survive, as a behaviour pattern, is habitual, as he has learned to respond to neglect and isolation by the use of violence, which is the product of his parents' actions when they presumably tried to

"communicate" with him. In his school, Ben starts to encounter direct bodily harm rather than the mental damage his parents inflicted on him: "There was no telephone call, no letter. Ben, whom she examined for bruises every evening when he came home, seemed to have entered the tough and often brutal world of secondary school without difficulty. 'Do you like this school, Ben?' 'Yes' …" (110); Ben shows no signs of distress when he returns home from school. Ben is attacked and bullied, but retaliates with physical force. Moreover, he even likes the school as he adopts violence and hostility as a means of communication. Ben struggles in school with physical violence inflicted on him by his peers because he is not part of a group or a community.

Ben reaches this conclusion through the discrimination he endured in his house and school; he knows that he is different and that he alone is weak and has no means to protect himself. Zygmunt Bauman associates the need to be part of a group (protection in numbers) with weaker individuals who lack the means for protection. With a gap in the level of recognition and how this recognition is practised among individuals, people develop strategies to primarily belong and affiliate themselves with a group when lacking support (Bauman 179). Ben has a fundamental need to be part of a community to acquire security, safety and survival. He moves from the position of dominance within his family to a more aggressive role, where he "leads" a gang of young, rebellious teenagers. He finds in them a group that has "similar" traits to him. Harriet feels that her son is part of a group of youngsters and not alone anymore, but still can observe how different he is from them:

> She would look at them, from the stairs perhaps, as she came down into the living-room, a group of youths, large, or thin, or plump, dark, fair, or redheaded—and among them Ben, squat, powerful, heavy-shouldered, with his bristly yellow hair growing in that strange pattern, with his watchful, alien eyes—and she thought, But he's not really younger than they are! He's much shorter, yes. But it almost seems that he dominates them. When they sat around the big family table, talking in their style, which was loud, raucous, jeering, jokey, they were always looking at Ben. Yet he spoke very little. When he did say something, it was never much more than Yes, or No. Take this! Get that! Give me— whatever it was, a sandwich, a bottle of Coke. And he watched them carefully all the time. He was the boss of this gang, whether they knew it or not. (111)

Harriet is not pleased with this new reality as Ben is now separated from the family. She never gets the chance to understand him or connect with him. Ben and Harriet's relationship has never been close; Ben is isolated from the family and only interacts with his mother. Now she is separated from him, and all the other children are gone. The way she sees Ben as having "watchful, alien eyes" implies the irreversible state of Ben's position as the Other, even though she refers to him as their "Boss". It is possible

to argue a mutual acceptance between Ben and those troubled young adults, but his Otherness is still present here. He acquires some acceptance through sheer violence and domination, which suggests that this new group has not truly absorbed Ben's "differences"; they just fear him or need him. The relationship between Ben and "the gang" is a form of mutual benefit; Ben needs them for his survival, and they also use Ben's physical attributes to their advantage when committing their crimes, but do not acknowledge him as their peer. Thus, Ben needs to be recognised as his true self, not through the voiced dominance that he is expressing, to find himself a place in society, which he still views from the position of an "Alien", as his mother suggested.

The new state Ben obtains through being part of this new community serves only the need for security, but does not address Ben's lack of self-identification and freedom. According to Bauman, the cost of belonging to a community is partially a sacrifice of individuality. He describes communities as "an island of homely and cosy tranquillity" amid the hostile sea; however, the comfort and sense of belonging come at a cost, which is to silently surrender the freedom of individuality (182). It is a cosy place that people need in a harsh world, but it is also difficult to change, as this is unrealistic and raises uncertainty about the loyalty to this community's values. It is not a direct eradication of identity but a compromising effort to be "similar" to others or to express that one places the group's interests before that of themselves as individuals. These characteristics of communities make it difficult to challenge the norms and beliefs within them. In Ben's case, the formation of identity is disturbed by his upbringing. Ben has no true identity to compromise and negotiate a place in a community; he suddenly finds himself taking the position as a "boss" of a "gang".

The weakness in Ben's ability to acquire a sound identity is the embodiment of his abjection. This state has been attached to him since his infancy and will continue to be his reality throughout his teenage years and into adulthood. He does not identify with his gang; he needs them. However, they may acknowledge him as a "leader" because they recognise his "similarities" to them; these are not only his forceful reactions to others, but they have also experienced a similar rejection by society. He is not only abjected by the Other, but in this sense, he becomes abject to himself. Julia Kristeva suggests that identity is realised by being in the position of abjection what she refers to as "Jouissance" in abjection. In *The Power of Horror*, she writes:

> One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it [on enjouit]. Violently and painfully. A passion. And, as in jouissance where the object of desire, known as object a [in Lacan's terminology], bursts with the shattered mirror where the ego gives up its image in order to contemplate itself in the Other, there is nothing either objective or objectal to the abject. It is simply a frontier, a repulsive gift that the Other, having become alter ego, drops so that 'I' does not disappear in it but finds, in that sublime alienation, a forfeited existence. (9)

In this passage, Kristeva notes on the paradoxical nature of abjection, how this state is repulsive yet can be a primary process in the construction of an identity. Ben exists in this realm of objection. He lacks the means to escape or establish a stable identity. This abjection has been the case since birth for Ben, as he has been cast out as an Other, a burden on the family that they are forced to dispose of. He is emotionally and physically unresponsive to this family, and his presence disturbs all that they considered "normal". Ben, within Kristeva's framework, is a threat to the boundaries between the human and nonhuman, the civilised and the primitive, the familiar and the alien. The moral challenge the family faces evokes the "jouissance" of abjection—a violent confrontation with that which must be expelled in order to sustain the self.

For Harriet, Ben embodies what Kristeva's "repulsive gift": a figure of the abject that tests the limits of her identity as both a mother and a woman, as well as her moral agency in dealing with the Other. Ben is aware of this abject state he occupies; he senses the rejection and fear in the Other(s), not completely comprehending his position, but as he grows older, this otherness comes to create an existential crisis. In Ben, in the World, he begins to seek deeper connections, which will be further analysed in a more pronounced sense in the second chapter.

Chapter 2: The Physical Embodiment of the "Other", Ben Lovatt in *Ben, in the World*

In *The Fifth Child*, Ben Lovatt is portrayed as a character without a voice; he remains silent and is observed by the rest of the novel's characters. However, in the sequel, Ben, in the World, Ben's emotions and thoughts grant him a voice, but the violent tendencies shown at the end of the first part of his narrative are still present. The narrative begins with Ben trying to find a place in the world without the presence of any of his family members, implying that they had abandoned him as a teenager, marking the end of his childhood. The novel explores the psychological effects of the circumstances of the "Other" by examining the social elements that shape and influence individual identity within the context of marginalised people and minorities. Lessing addresses in her novel the status of the human condition in the notion of abjection, the distinction between the "self" and the "Other" in the formation of identities for individuals, such as Ben and the women he meets, who are living in isolation and are observed through the same lens of abjection. Ben explores this question by searching for a mother, a lover, and "his people", the direct connection he needs with human beings that associates him with a sense of belonging that he has never felt in his childhood.

The aspects of genuine human compassion shown in the novel acquaint Ben with a general feeling of belonging to people affected by discrimination, mainly the female characters in Ben's "adult life". Moreover, the novel's themes explore the environmental factors that shape the setting for "otherness" by critiquing contemporary life's societal and economic structures. After leaving his family, which does not accept him or perceive him as one of them, in the novel, Ben travels across England, France, and Brazil. Ben meets several people who have viewed his "differences" through the same lens of otherness and abjectification. They attempt to take advantage of him. Some are interested in his "unusual" qualities and try to exploit him for scientific research to advance their careers or scientific knowledge. In contrast, others view him as a possible source of profits in non-ethical and selfish ways, such as involving him in criminal activities or using him as entertainment for a movie.

The first voiced ideas of Ben are of a child trying to understand the divergent nature of his new circumstances as an "adult", he stands in front of an office to ask for

unemployment benefits as instructed by an old woman, Ellen Biggs, who befriended him four years after he has departed from home. Ben is the "outsider" to his family, with previous attempts at abandonment by his parents; his primary interaction with his family is with caution. His parents "communicate" with him for the safety of his siblings and try to control his physical impulses. They did not equip him with the intuition or tools the youth needed to survive in the modern world. Ben does not even know his age, as he has no birth certificate or official documents, but with his lack of means to survive, he must search for a source of income. The only information that he has about himself is from a note written by his mother:

> Your name is Ben Lovatt.
> Your mother's name is Harriet Lovatt.
> Your father's name is David Lovatt.
> You have four brothers and sisters, Luke, Helen, Jane,
> and Paul.
> They are older than you. You are fifteen years old
> On the other side of the card had been:
> You were born ……
> Your home address is …… (11)

The old woman does not know his age, and the unemployment office does not help him without this information. As he has been saying, she trusts that Ben is eighteen, but his behaviour makes her think he is still a child. This age is concluded by Ben calculating the years he has been away from home through each year marked by Christmas celebrations. Acknowledging time passage does not make Ben understand the meaning of "adulthood". The characteristics used to observe adolescence are of both mental and biological nature. The changes that distinguish a child or a teenager from an adult are in the physical attributes, mainly the completion of puberty and the full development of sexual characteristics, such as facial hair in males and breast growth in females.

In Ben's narrative, there is a strong emphasis on these characteristics that determine Ben's age. Ellen Biggs, a woman who is referred to as "the old woman" in the novel, faces difficulties with the question of Ben as an "Adult", as her confusion is displayed in the following lines: "In many ways he was childish, and yet when she took a good look at that face she could even think him middle-aged, with those lines

around his eyes. Little ones, but still: no eighteen-year-old could have them" (18). The association of adulthood with appearance is on the surface, but the old woman's description shows a young man who has experienced a rough life for his age. He exhibits signs of ageing that of a man in his mid-thirties, which indicates the burdens and suffering he has experienced; however, his behaviour is not that of a mature man, and he is yet to be fully developed or integrated into his adult life cycle.

There is a difference between Ben's chronological age and his "mental" and "biological" age, yet he is expected to act like an adult. On various occasions in the novel, Ben is portrayed as a "normal" member of society. However, on other occasions, he returns to primitive human behaviour, controlled by his survival instincts and sexual urges. In her book *Developmental Theories Through the Life Cycle*, Sonia G. Austrian explores the various approaches to developmental theory. She explains that there is no strict relation between age and developmental phase. Development is influenced by culture and biology, and even though some roles are typically associated with a certain chronological age, they do not necessarily determine the expected cognitive and emotional changes. These roles are socially structured (Austrian 3). Austrian's observation reflects on the social expectations and stereotypes regarding age and development. In this sense, the development phase of an individual human being is a complex process that cannot be easily calculated or measured, as the factors that determine maturity vary across different social structures, which are not typically associated with chronological age.

This development is also explained through psychology, with exceptions that can arise from mental challenges and traumas. In the case of Ben, his development phase is not complete. Being in an abjectified state since his childhood, Ben is still in the infancy phase, but in the body of a physically and sexually developed adult. Ben does not fit into the conventional developmental phases prescribed by his society. He struggles with the roles and expectations forced on him. Ben's experiences reflect how society's expectations based on chronological age do not account for individual differences in development. His outsider status highlights the disconnection between chronological age and actual psychological and social development, mirroring the idea that human development is influenced as much by culture as by biology.

A child's development cycle begins with infancy or early childhood. According to Sonia G Austrian, a child depends on adults (primarily the mother) in the early

childhood phase. In the first three years, they provide him with the environment to develop, which includes the security and safety of the child as well as food and shelter, this is has been historically accomplished through a so-called nuclear family, one with traditional gender roles where a mother takes the primary role in addressing the child's nourishment, protection and comfort; however, this is not the reality of today's societies. Mothers are not home 53 per cent of the time, and they are more engaged in work. Fathers are not taking the necessary responsibility towards their children in the absence of mothers (Austrian 9). The child's lack of skills during the infancy phase makes him dependent on his parents and the adults around him. Ben is shown at the beginning of the second part of his narrative, living in the house of a senior woman who takes the role of his unofficial guardian and tries to guide him in a way that ensures his independence before her death.

Ellen Biggs finds Ben at a supermarket as he is trying to steal a piece of bread. She takes him home, and since that day, she feeds and washes him under the safety of her roof. She is shown to be amazed by his masculine features: "It felt like that, as if she were washing a dog. On the upper arms, there was hair, but not so much, not more than could be on an ordinary man. His chest was hairy, but it wasn't like fur; it was a man's chest. She handed him the soap, but he let it slide into the water, and dug around furiously for it" (15). This quote indicates how Ellen has seen Ben; he possesses the features of an adult man, but with behavioural traits associated with a pet (a dog). The word "ordinary" gives the impression that she is confused about how to address Ben's differences. Moreover, the way she tries to teach him how to wash himself and his failure to do so imply that there is a vulnerable child in his first stage of development inside this strong and hairy man's body.

The social and cultural attributes that a child transforms into a fully functioning adult are also influenced by psychoanalytic factors. Sigmund Freud states that adult life is determined by aspects of the first six or seven years. He does not address the idea of adolescence beyond the Oedipus complex resolution. For Freud, at puberty, a child gains the ability to orgasm and becomes capable of reproduction. The child, both male and female, then engages in sexual fantasies before they can start relationships. In addition to sexual awakening, Freud sees this moment of transition as a time of detachment from the parents' authority and influence (Austrian 136). Freud's theory emphasises that a person's early experiences significantly influence their adult life,

especially during the first six or seven years of life. His conceptions of adolescence focus primarily on the Oedipus complex's resolution and the start of puberty, which is the period of sexual maturation and separation from parental control. It is important to note that Freudian views were criticised for neglecting other important factors like identity formation, cognitive development, and social interactions; he essentially simplifies the complexity of adolescence to sexual development and independence from the parents.

Ben is an eighteen-year-old "man"; he is at the age that makes him legally an adult, according to most countries and international legal bodies worldwide. This social label is different from the stigma of being a so-called "monster child" in the first novel, *The Fifth Child*. He cannot isolate himself or act recklessly with a "gang" that can secure him a certain level of acknowledgement and an "identity," as such behaviour leads to him facing legal persecution, and he is not equipped with the social skills to become a real criminal. As for his mental development, it is difficult to observe the transition from his early childhood to adulthood and see any signs of maturity. Ben does not have a family bond that he can detach himself from, and he does not show signs of sexual awakening in his teenage years, as other teenagers of his age "normally" do. To truly develop as an adult, Ben needs genuine emotional bonds and social interactions in both formal and intimate contexts, which become more evident in the second part of his narrative, Ben *in the World*.

3.1 Longing for the Mother: Abandonment, Attachment, and Ben's Maternal Otherness:

Ben is an abandoned child who has lost his family and does not have any form of compensation that can reaffirm his condition to a state where he can continue to develop. In the novel, Ben lives an unstable life; he is constantly being moved from one house to another. Ben has no place to call his own or people to whom he can attach himself as part of a community; he also lacks the "natural" attachment that a child has to the mother. In his book *Attachment and Loss*, John Bowlby discusses attachment to mothers and how it affects children's development. He notes in his book four main theories in which the process of attachment has been studied and analysed: Secondary Drive Theory (Cupboard-Love Theory), Primary Object Sucking Theory, Primary, Object Clinging Theory and Primary Return-to-Womb Craving Theory, and he emphasises the importance of the Secondary Drive Theory in his studies, according to

Bowlby, it functions differently from the other three, who argues the following: “It postulates that the child’s tie to his mother is a product of the activity of a number of behavioural systems that have proximity to mother as a predictable outcome” (Bowlby 179). Bowlby highlights the complexity of the attachment process, stressing that children’s attachment to their mothers is not the result of a single dynamic but rather the outcome of multiple behavioural systems operating together.

These behavioural systems that a child practices and experiences in the presence of a “mother,” such as seeking comfort, protection, and security, naturally lead the child to maintain intimacy with this mother figure. This viewpoint indicates a sphere of influence beyond the primary descriptions of attachment that is based on the fulfilment of basic needs (e.g., food and warmth), suggesting that the attachment process is deeply rooted in a child’s instinctive behaviours, geared towards ensuring proximity to the caregiver for ensuring the child’s survival and emotional well-being. Bowlby’s theory emphasises the significance of these innate behavioural systems in shaping the foundational human experience of attachment.

Ben’s struggle with his feelings towards his mother and the old woman who occupies a parallel role of a mother figure is a sound example of this proximity. Ben does not fully comprehend his reactions towards his mother. The novel depicts his thoughts towards seeing his mother as follows: “His mother, he wanted to see his mother. Because of the kindness of the old lady, he had remembered that other kindness, and understood that that was what it had been: she, like the old lady, had not hurt him, she had come to rescue him from that place …” (25). Ben’s thoughts about his mother reflect a profound longing for the comfort and safety associated with her presence, triggered by the kindness of the “old lady”. Ben's feelings resonate with Bowlby’s arguments on attachment, where the child’s connection with the mother is established and strengthened by experiences of care and protection.

Ben realises that his mother, akin to the old lady, “had not hurt him” and “had come to rescue him,” referring to the time his mother, Harriet, comes to discharge him from the institution in the narrative of *The Fifth Child*. Ben’s experience aligns with Bowlby’s concept that attachment behaviours are activated by circumstances that threaten the child’s sense of safety. When these behaviours lead to a positive response from the caregiver, such as protection or kindness, the connection is strengthened, and the child learns to associate the caregiver with safety and relief from distress. Ben’s reflection

illustrates how these early experiences of care and rescue shape his attachment, making his mother a central figure in his world, someone he instinctively longs to be close to, especially when seeking comfort.

In the novel, Ben encounters several female figures whom he views as replacements for his mother. These experiences help him move towards a process of "detachment" from the mother's object; the object that he previously perceived contributed to his stigmatisation and abjection. By gaining more experiences and exploring the world around him, Ben forms new behavioural structures that help him function as an adult who no longer needs this maternal attachment. John Bowlby concludes that the attachment changes in the long term: "After a certain age attachment behaviour diminishes both in its intensity and in the frequency with which it is elicited. In all likelihood several different processes are at work. One probably is a change in form taken by the behavioural systems mediating attachment behaviour itself" (Bowlby 197). Bowlby's conclusion implies that as children develop, their attachment behaviours change, leading to independence, and an exploratory behaviour replaces the attachment. Ben has not sustained any attachment relation, which he may adapt and change into a more independent member of society.

Since he has departed from "home", Ben has been looking for a new place, and with this new place, a new female figure will provide him with the same emotional interaction he has experienced while living with his mother. Before the old woman has taken him in, Ben takes shelter on a farm to escape a rival gang, as he has accidentally been affiliated with "gang conflicts". After brutally beating a group of bikers who attacked him, he was injured, too, but he has successfully protected himself in the physical sense. At a pub, a girl helps him gain back his senses: "He was taken into a pub by a girl who worked there. She washed him down, sat him in a corner, gave him something to eat, talked him into sense again. He was quiet at last, dazed perhaps" (19). This description of Ben's state after the incident reveals that Ben consistently requires assistance with his needs, a characteristic typically associated with children who face challenges with their peers. However, Ben is not a child. The dangers Ben faces are serious and life-threatening, which is the reason he stops being linked with gangs and avoids these relations, as they are not efficient for his survival as an "adult".

On the farm, he meets with the Grindly family, which consists of two brothers, Matthew and Ted Grindly, and their sister, Mary Grindly. Mary is the boss of their

business, and she instructs Ben on what to do throughout his time at the farm. Ben and Mary have a good relationship, and she depends on him for his physical abilities. Ben is efficient with his work, and Mary is satisfied. She is impressed by his room and how organised it is, not as messy as her brothers'. "She was impressed that he cared about his personal cleanliness, and liked his clothes neat" (21). Her thoughts about Ben suggest that, despite his circumstances, living in a small, unpleasant room with old furniture, Ben maintains a sense of self-respect and tries to create a decent space for himself. Those details imply Ben's desire to maintain a positive image or perhaps seek approval or acceptance from those around him, like Mary, as he navigates this new "life".

In the past, Ben has stayed in healthier environments, in his parents' house and the old lady's, while the living standards on the farm are different: "Ben was given a room, with poor furniture in it — very different from the pleasant rooms he had been brought up in" (20). The way he acts in this sense implies that his behaviour is related to how he is treated; he appreciates the poor living conditions with the old woman and the old room he has settled in on the farm. Ben's positive approach to Mary's treatment gives him a sense of individuality, as he is an active member of a community where he earns a living, works, and has a place to which he belongs. Ben does not know the value of this new source of income; for him what is vital most is his relationship with Mary, the new female figure in his life, that can compensate for the mother figure he longs for: "It was Mary he did not want to leave, though he was fond of the cow and enjoyed the antics of the pigs. He thought Mary was good to him. She mended his clothes, bought him a new thick jersey for the winter, and gave him plenty of meat to eat. She was never cross with him, as she was with her brothers" (22). This quote summarises Ben's relationship to the Grindlys. He remains with them to experience empathy and comfort. He needs a human connection with a female figure to stimulate the sensation a mother produces, as he lacks the means to reconnect with his biological mother.

The attachment pattern observed in Ben's behaviour is an anxious resistance attachment, shown in his reaction to kindness from the motherly figures he encounters in the novel, according to John Bowlby's interpretation of the attachment theory and its patterns, introduced by Mary Ainsworth in 1971. In his book, *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development*, Bowlby discusses the

attachment patterns and their influence on children's development: "A second pattern is that of anxious resistant attachment in which the individual is uncertain whether his parent will be available or responsive or helpful when called upon. Because of this uncertainty he is always prone to separation anxiety, tends to be clinging, and is anxious about exploring the world" (167). Ben's behaviour is part of this framework of attachment and anxiety, where he alters his actions according to the desires of those whom he encounters through his journey.

Ben's attention to personal appearance while staying with the Grindly and Mary's appreciation of his behaviour suggest that Ben strives for approval and connection, and clings to any human being who provides him with comfort. This desire for a new caregiver is evidence of an inconsistent history of attachment experiences. He is preoccupied with the need to ensure a position where he is accepted and valued, which aligns with an anxious resistance attachment pattern. This tendency to secure himself a place within the structure of a "family" reflects strong anxious feelings in maintaining relationships, characterised by a fear of rejection or abandonment; these are common characteristics of this attachment pattern. Ben is fearful of being abandoned again, as he has not yet recovered from the traumatic effect of rejection bestowed upon him by his family.

As argued in the first chapter of this thesis, Ben's relationship with his mother is essentially associated with a strong state of abjection, which Ben has been placed in since the first instants of his life inside her womb. The mother-son relationship of Ben and Harriet explores the closeness of attachment and the repulsive reaction to abjectification, which in the novel results in Ben being stigmatised and treated as a "monster". This state of abjection is the main reason for Ben's isolation, and it is a result of detachment from the "mother figure". Ben has not lost his mother, but the impact of abandonment is one of loss and grief; Ben has been placed in an institution for children who are perceived to have "deformities" or "Monstrous" characteristics. His mother has rescued him from that place; however, the traumatic effect of the experience remains. Bowlby in *Attachment and Loss Vol. 3: Loss, Sadness and Depression*, reflects on the impact of losing the mother, gradually placing the child in a state of misery. The longing for the mother's return does not diminish; it returns, but the child realises the reality that his mother is not coming back (Bowlby 9). Ben only has the memories of his mother as someone who has been good to him, evoked by his

relationship with another "mother figure", the old woman. He acknowledges the impossibility of returning to his previous life.

In *The Fifth Child*, Ben's realisation of the broken bond with his mother is conveyed through a moment of profound "non-recognition" of his primary caregiver: "He didn't recognise her, she thought. She did not dare unwind the jacket. She was afraid of injecting him anywhere near his neck. At last, she managed to grab, and hold, an ankle, jabbed the needle into the lower part of his calf, and waited until he went limp: it took a few moments. What was this stuff?" (80). Ben is forced to return to his family after this brief moment of detachment. When analysing the trauma that Ben and Harriet experienced as they left the institution, there is a noticeable fear and anxiety of the Other from both Ben's and Harriet's standpoints.

Ben tries to re-establish a connection with his mother after years of estrangement. However, his close encounter with his mother after the Old Woman insisted that he go and see her awakens a feeling of hate and rage towards his previous life with his family, the Lovatts. In childhood, Ben's feelings towards his father are hostile, viewing him as the enemy. Moreover, he also perceives another member of his family, Paul, one of his brothers, as a rival for his mother's attention and love. The rejection he faces in his relationship with Paul results in a reaction of jealousy and enmity. Ben's relationship with Paul and this hate is rooted in the position that Paul occupies as an antithesis entity to Ben's nature and identity, which makes him a replacement or the son that has received all the love and acceptance Ben yearns for. Paul, the Lovatt's son, is not viewed as a "monster". Unlike Ben, Paul belongs to the family. In the novel, Ben's feelings as he comes close to a possible reunion with his family are presented as follows:

> There he was, a tall, rather weedy young man, with long arms and bony hands, and his eyes — but Ben knew those eyes without having to see them: large, hazy blue eyes. Paul was smiling at his mother. She patted the bench beside her and Paul sat down, and the mother took Paul's hand and held it. A rage so terrible that Ben's eyes darkened and seemed to bleed was shaking him. He wanted to push him down and […] There was one thing he knew, and he knew it very well, because of so many bad things […] There were certain feelings he had that were not allowed. Until this rage, this hate, left him alone he could not go anywhere near his mother, near his brother, Paul. But the feelings were getting worse, he could hardly breathe, and through a red glare he watched his mother and that tormentor, that impostor who had always stood between him and his mother, get up and walk away together. (26)

This close encounter between Ben and his family demonstrates the intense family dynamics that Ben has been experiencing. In his childhood, Ben is incapable of expressing himself, and most of his reactions are primal and instinctively driven

towards survival. However, in this scene, Ben is fully capable of comprehension; he can understand his circumstances, the reasons behind his anger and impulsive feelings towards his brother, and the appropriate reaction he requires to take. Ben acknowledges that he is the "outsider" to the family. This idea fuels rage and hate, centred on jealousy of Paul. Ben's hatred for Paul is not simply about Paul as an individual but about the barrier that Paul embodies for Ben to reach his mother. Paul's physical closeness to their mother—a proximity Ben desires but cannot achieve—intensifies Ben's feelings of alienation and rejection. The "red glare" and the overwhelming rage Ben experiences indicate how hatred forms a pattern of attachment to his mother and Paul.

Ben's yearning for his mother's love is associated with hatred and an intimate attachment to the mother. In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotions*, Sara Ahmed suggests that hatred embodies a pattern of attachment associated with an ambivalent form of intimacy. This attachment is an investment in an object of hate because it is perceived as a threat coming from the outside; the subject returns to itself through this attachment of hate, not opposed to love but associated with it, according to Ahmed (Ahmed 50). Ben perceives Paul as the "imposter" who has taken his place in the family and established the mother-son relationship he contemplates. He is an object of hate for Ben in this pattern of attachment. A connection through hate binds Ben to Paul, but it also reinforces his attachment to his mother. The more intense the hate between them becomes, the stronger Ben's attachment to his mother grows. Ben has been seen as the "other" in his childhood, but in his relationship with Paul, he takes the side that views this threat of the outsider. Ahmed's concept of attachment suggests that the object is tied to the subject's life in a complex manner, positioned in response to an external threat to the subject; the intertwined love and hate link the two.

Ben's intense emotional reaction indicates an internalised struggle. His rage and jealousy reveal his feelings of unworthiness and his inability to claim the connection he desires. His hatred for Paul intensifies his sense of displacement as Ben suppresses his rage and has to "not go anywhere near his mother, near his brother." (26). He is burdened by his emotions and unable to express his feelings towards his family without hurting them; Ben is forced to leave willingly and never try to unite with them again. The more he represses those emotions, the more control they have over him, illustrating Ahmed's concept that hatred is not a simple rejection but a powerful emotional investment. Ben begins to perceive his mother and brother as the other who

"betrayed" him. In this sense, they are placed in the abjectified state that he has been occupying their life, but this time it is he who experiences the abject. As previously pointed out in Chapter One, the abjectification of the other, as discussed through Julia Kristeva's theory, is formed in the sphere where subjects find a sense of identity in Otherness, which she describes as a "jouissance" in abjection. This raises the question of whether Ben's engagement with abjection offers potential for identity reconstruction or is destructive and keeps him entrapped in the position of the other.

In the last part of the novel, Ben meets Tressa, one of the women who takes care of him in *Ben, in the World*. Teresa is a young Brazilian woman who has created a strong motherly bond with Ben Lovatt. Ben is introduced to her through an American film producer, Alex, who is interested in his unique behavioural traits and wants to make a movie about him. She is also working in the movie industry, as an actress; however, she is later revealed to have been initially working as a "prostitute." Ben ends up in Rio de Janeiro with drug smugglers, who use his "unconventional appearance" for their crimes and then abandon him. While staying with Alex and Teresa, Ben engages in a fight on one of the local beaches; how Teresa reacts and how she takes care of him after the fight portrays a loving mother thinking of Ben as her own, depicts her thoughts as follows:

> Teresa took Ben to the bathroom and — as the old woman had done — took off what remained of his clothes, without embarrassment, talking gently to him. 'It's all right, you're safe now, don't be frightened, poor Ben, stand in the shower, that's right.' And Teresa washed off the sand and dirt, stopped the blood from a scratch on his forehead, and put his torn trousers into the washing machine. She fetched clean clothes, dressed him, and he let her do all this, passive in her hands, turning around when she asked, lifting an arm or a foot […] That night which because of Alex leaving the next day she should have spent with him in his bed, Teresa was with Ben, who was lying dressed on his bed, not sleeping. She was holding his hand and talking softly to him. She was worried by his passivity, his indifference. This young woman who had seen everything in her short life of extremes of all kinds, knew very well that this Ben, the unknown, was in a crisis, was undergoing some kind of inner change (80).

Of all the female figures that Ben has acquainted himself with, Teresa offers him intimate and compassionate mother-son care. What distinguishes Teresa from the others, such as Mrs. Biggs, Mary Grindley, and his mother, Harriet, is the level of acceptance and the way Teresa approaches him with a gentle and soft touch, acknowledging that he is merely a child. Moreover, when she treats his wounds, her perception is of an intuitive understanding of the fragility and vulnerability of a traumatised child, both physically and mentally. In contrast, the other females in his life have viewed him with caution, fascination, and fear, which implies that their

reception of him is not only a lack of recognition but also of an "inhuman" figure. Ben reacts positively to her kind and caring hands, complying with her requests without tension or resistance. This moment is a rare scene where Ben finally surrenders; he feels an unusual sense of safety and trust. Teresa is the first and only person in Ben's life who has understood his pain without him articulating a word.

What Teresa represents is "a good enough mother", a term that Donald Winnicott coined in his book *Playing and Reality*, as a mother who takes a primary caregiver role, attending to the infant's needs, imperfectly but "enough". Winnicott describes this mother as follows: "The good-enough 'mother' (not necessarily the infant's own mother) is one who makes active adaptation to the infant's needs, an active adaptation that gradually lessens, according to the infant's growing ability to account for failure of adaptation and to tolerate the results of frustration (Winnicott 27). This process will gradually help the child or toddler to have a sense of self, as it is not flawless. Teresa is a good example of Winnicott's notion of the "good enough mother". In her relationship with Ben, she does not expect him to be perfect or try to educate him; she mainly provides him with the basic needs of a child. Ben is frustrated with the environment he is in and the treatment he receives as an Other.

Being constantly observed and pressured by the film that he knows nothing about, this makes him anxious: "he was banging his head on the wall, thud, thud, thud" (77). Ben is experiencing a significant level of distress. Alex responses: "kids do that," reflects the failure of Ben's environment to meet his emotional needs; however, Teresa's reaction sees Ben for what he truly is, a child that needs help: "She felt that hairy face on her bare upper chest, and knew that this was a child she was holding" (77). This moment demonstrates the "holding environment" that Winnicott considers necessary for a child's psychological growth, what he refers to as mirror of the mother: "In individual emotional development, the precursor of the mirror is the mother's face […] What does the baby see when he or she looks at the mother's face? I am suggesting that, ordinarily, what the baby sees is himself or herself. In other words the mother is looking at the baby and what she looks like is related to what she sees there" (Winnicott 141-142).

Winnicott's framework suggests that a mother's role is that of a mirror, where a baby sees himself (a reference to Lacan's Mirror Stage), which provides reflection that aids the child in forming a sense of self. Failure in this process, as is the case with Ben,

results in an unstable sense of identity. While Ben is perceived as a reflection of monstrosity and otherness, Teresa looks at him differently, which allows him to see a better version of himself. Her gaze rejects this stigma, and in her being his "good enough mother", Ben gets another chance to experience the emotional recognition his biological mother has denied him. Ben instinctively perceives this recognition: "So they all treated Ben carefully, though kindly, trying not to stare at him. But Teresa, Ben knew, was really kind: he could feel she was" (72). Teresa does not judge Ben; she only shows genuine concern. These diverse experiences with mothers expose the developmental and social shattering consequences of otherness, which Ben is never shown to have moved beyond.

3.2 The Lover and the Stranger: Sexual Awakening, Maternal Substitution, and Erotic Desire:

In Ben, in the World, Ben's persistent sense of anxiety and estrangement as the Other is evident in various aspects of his life, mainly shown in his relationships. He struggles to secure a sense of belonging, whether in a family-like environment with Mrs Biggs, on the farm with the Grindlys, with Teresa or in his unsuccessful attempt to reconnect with his mother. Despite these repeated failures, Ben continues to move forward, seeking comfort and connection through new female figures who offer him brief moments of companionship and understanding. This pursuit of acceptance leads him to a place that is supposedly a brothel, where he meets Rita. Ben's reaction to the strange woman (Rita) and the setting in which he has his first sexual experience with her is described as follows: "He saw a woman in that doorway — that one, next to Super Universal Cabs. She had smiled at him. He followed the smile, went up narrow stairs behind her, and found himself in a room that he knew was poor and ugly, because he was contrasting it with what he remembered of his home, when he still had one, with his mother" (34). Ben follows the smile of a strange woman into an unfamiliar setting, where he previously stated his beliefs about it to be dangerous. Ben's decision to follow this gesture of kindness reveals his vulnerability and need for warmth and belonging. He seeks moments of comfort irrespective of their context or nature.

In this passage, Ben's recollections of the past influence his decisions and feelings towards places and people. He is captivated by this room, even if it is "a room that he knew was poor and ugly." Nothing is appealing in this place, but what is significant for Ben is the sentiments and emotions he endeavours to stimulate by being close to

"home" by staying in a place similar to the house he shared with his mother or interacting with a woman who provides him with simple acts of kindness. However, Ben has been neglected and mistreated in his childhood; he measures his experience of estrangement and displacement with that of neglect as a child and establishes that an approximation to his previous circumstances is better than living in isolation. Ben has left Ms Biggs and the Grindlys, which suggests, as argued before in this thesis, a need for an attachment to a female figure and a fear of abandonment by them.

Since Ben's has been abandoned by his family, with his mother not being able to keep him home, each encounter with a female figure whom he hopes to establish a connection with is marked by fear of rejection; none of the women in the novel fully accept Ben's "abnormalities", even those who have shown a high level of tolerance, or where impressed by some of his behavioural traits, such as his empathy or hard work. In his experiences with Mrs Biggs and Mary Grindly, Ben has not established a genuine emotional connection that compensates for his mother's absence. With Mrs Biggs, Ben is more of a companion than a son. They both need the presence of another human being to fulfil the social necessity of human connection. Moreover, she thinks of him and treats him as an animal, irrespective of her good intentions: "In his sleep Ben ran from enemies, hunted, fought. She knew he was not human: 'not one of us' as she put it" (17). Her inability to accept him as a fully human individual leads him to understand that he must eventually leave. As for Mary, their relationship is initially formed in a professional setting. Ben merely works for the family; he is not considered part of the Grindlys and is seen as nothing more than a skilled farm worker.

While these interactions bring temporary comfort for Ben, they do not provide the recognition he yearns for. What Ben experiences is a form of behavioural attachment; he seeks security and comfort with these female figures because he fears abandonment and isolation. In her book *Patterns of Attachment: A Psychological Study of the Strange Situation,* Mary Ainsworth provides a practical observation of some behaviours associated with attachment and expands on Bowlby's attachment theory. She explains: "Fear behavior and attachment behavior are often activated at the same time by the same set of circumstances. When a young child is alarmed by one of the clues to increased risk of danger, whether natural or learned, he tends to seek increased proximity to an attachment figure" (Ainsworth et al, 20). Ainsworth suggests that when children sense danger, they seek comfort and security from an attachment figure. A

child's Anxiety and distress surge when the object of attachment is physically or emotionally absent. This idea implies that a child's response to fear is associated with their experiences with the caregiver's level of availability and how they have dealt with situations where the child needs protection and support. Ainsworth's study of the connection of fear and its association with children's experiences is relevant to Ben's case, as he needs attachment to establish a sense of security that he has no other means to form such attachment after being abandoned in his childhood.

Throughout the novel, Ben tries to form new attachments but fails to maintain them for an extended period. His attempts to find a female caregiver as a replacement for his mother reflect his need for the support of a woman, which he believes to be the only way to be safe and protected. This attachment behaviour influences how he chooses those with whom he places his trust and attaches himself. These criteria primarily apply to all the female figures in the novel. Nevertheless, Rita is different, and the connection they have made is different from that of a mother and son. Ben's primary goal when meeting "nice women" is to re-establish the lost connection with his mother. His relationship with Rita is not merely an attempt to find a mother but to discover a stable sense of identity, a place where he belongs. The sound difference that Rita has made for Ben is that she accepts him and likes the "real" Ben as he is. This difference is observed in their first sexual encounter, which is described in the novel as follows:

> She came over, and put her hands down into his pockets, one on either side, more out of exasperation because of the preposterousness of this customer, than expectation, and at this Ben's sexual nature, which he kept down, like all his other impermissible hungers, leaped up, and he gripped her by her shoulders, turned her around and, holding her fast, bent her so that she had to put her hands on the bed for support. He tugged up her skirt with one hand, pulled down her knickers, and took her from behind, short, sharp and violent. He had his teeth in her neck, and as he came he let out a grunting bark, like nothing she had ever heard before. He let her go, and she straightened up, flinging her pale hair off her face and stood looking at his face, then down at his thighs, the hairy thighs […] That query, that inspection, not hostile, had something in it that made him again grasp her, bend her over and begin again. He was starved for sex, had been hungry for it a long time, and just as if he had not so recently finished his first bout, his teeth went into her neck and she heard the triumphant grunting bark. Just a minute,' she said. Just wait a minute.' She pushed him so that he sat on the bed, and she sat on a chair opposite him. She needed time. This experience — a rape, that was what it amounted to — ought to be making her feel angry, and full of the contempt that she usually felt for her customers, but she had been thrilled by that double rape, the great powerful hands gripping her shoulders, the teeth in her neck, and, above all, the grunt like a roar. (35)

This passage portrays one of the most problematic instances in the novel, where Ben rapes a woman he has just met, Rita, in a brutal and shocking act of sexual assault. To thoroughly discuss the scene, it is essential to address the moral complexity of the act,

as Ben's circumstances differ from those of the typical perpetrators of this crime. Susan Brownmiller discusses in her book *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* the strong interrelation of power and dominance to rape and sexual violence. Brownmiller states in her book: "All rape is an exercise in power, but some rapists have an edge that is more than physical. They operate within an institutionalized setting that works to their advantage and in which a victim has little chance to redress her grievances (256). This argument emphasises that rape is always associated with a desire for power and is inseparable from such a need for dominance, which underscores both physical and psychological endeavour to possess the power to overwhelm the other and exert not only control over their bodies but also their minds.

However, in the case of Ben, his actions are not influenced by a desire to exert dominance over a woman but by his inability to understand the social dynamics of his actions. Ben acts based on primal instinct towards a woman who has stimulated his sexual impulses and drives. Unlike a typical rapist, Ben does not act out of malice or a conscious desire to harm his victim. Instead, his actions are impulsive; Ben is unaware of the consequences of his actions, as he is confused and does not understand the concepts of consent or social rules of conduct. In his teenage years, Ben develops a violent tendency (as explored in the first chapter), staying with a gang of thugs. It is also implied that he may have committed similar crimes earlier, as Harriet hints in *The Fifth Child*: "Now, whenever she heard of a break-in, or a mugging, or a rape anywhere, she blamed them; but thought she was unjust. They could not be blamed for everything!" (117). Her assumption reflects the broader societal prejudices Ben is subjected to.

This moment also reflects the societal influence on Ben's actions. Ben wants to express his emotions to Rita, one of which is observed later in their relationship as a yearning for acceptance rather than a lust for sex or a "patriarchal form of dominance". Ben's state of the abject has made it impossible for him to receive the proper guidance of a family or the collective support of his community to learn how to deal with his urges and feelings. Lessing's novel, *Ben, in the World,* provides a critical framework of the consequences of rejection and dehumanisation of individuals on their behaviours and reactions, reflecting on the narrative of Ben's adulthood and the marginalised women he meets, such as Rita. Still, the characteristics of Ben's act of violence are dominance and an expression of total control over Rita's body.

Catharine MacKinnon, a prominent feminist legal scholar and theorist, studies the dynamics of sexual violence against women during sexual intercourse and how it shapes the sexual identity of men. In MacKinnon's book, *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*, she offers an in-depth analysis of rape as a systematic expression of male violence. For MacKinnon, sexuality is treated among men as a form of gratification centred on a female object. Ben reflects on the female body as an instrument for male satisfaction. The way Ben treats Rita as an object, gripping her, bending her over, and biting her neck, demonstrates a sound expression of absolute dominance over her body. MacKinnon's framework analyses the social hierarchy of gender and sex. In this power relation, male pleasure and the extension of power are intertwined; sexual satisfaction is subject to the aggression imposed on those who are physically inferior to them. In this sense, sex is an exchange between a subject and an object, dominance and subordination. MacKinnon argues the following: "The male sexual role, this information and analysis taken together, suggests that it centres on aggressive intrusion on those with less power. Such acts of dominance are experienced as sexually arousing, as sex itself. They therefore are. The new knowledge on the sexual violation of women by men thus frames an inquiry into the place of sexuality in gender and of gender in sexuality" (MacKinnon 127). In her analysis, MacKinnon discusses the connection between male sexuality and the exertion of power on others, and examines both the male and female behaviours associated with these power dynamics.

According to MacKinnon, this framework is engraved in the behaviours of both "men" and "women" as a social construct. Ben's assault on Rita stems from a societal structure that normalises violence and exploitation of women's bodies. Ben's act is a product of his community; the divergence in his motifs and intentions from those of a rapist does imply that he is different, but the form of expression is starkly the same. Similarly, Rita's behaviour is also affected by her sex and gender and how she is perceived by men as a sex worker, which makes her vulnerable to sexual aggression. Rita's experience of rape gives her a "thrill" feeling. It does not indicate pleasure but confusion as to how she has to react. This mixture of feelings suggests that Rita has internalised patriarchal values that eroticise the power imbalances and make her perceive them as part of a "man's" sexuality.

With this analysis of the male sexual identity, MacKinnon redefines consent in a patriarchal social structure as difficult to attain or ensure from women. Her notion of

power dynamics demonstrates an ugly reality that women in weak social positions are forced to accept a certain level of violence to survive. MacKinnon argues that women are socialised to respond passively to sexual violence constructed by a male-dominated culture. Any form of resistance carries a greater risk of physical harm and humiliation (MacKinnon 177). Ben's attack depicts fierce brutality, animalistic drive, and aggression. "The triumphant bark" describes an animal following a primal instinct to perform a long-awaited "mating". Despite this brutality, she is not angry. Rita realises that she "ought" to be angry and recognises that she has just been raped. She tries to stop Ben for a minute to process the situation, her emotions and her unexpected arousal. Rita accepts the rape not because she consents to it but because she sees male aggression as an inevitability. Rita's reaction implies that she has experienced such violence before, yet Ben is different.

Ben's behaviour does not conform to the familial order that his family believes to be "normal", and that is how he has been presented in *The Fifth Child*. If Ben's behaviour is completely instinctual, or as explained by those around him, as approximated to animals, then when addressing his motives for his acts of violence and relating it to his attachment behaviour, Other factors will surface. Judith Butler critiques the theories of infantile sexual development.

In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Judith Butler challenges the notion that psychoanalysts have taken as a foundation for their theories, particularly those of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Butler's critiques focus on the structural claim of an origin to sexual identity or desire, and that the sexual orientation is shaped or repressed by social norms. She observes in their framework an affirmative effort to normalise only heterosexuality as the natural sexuality and deem homosexuality as abnormal or deviant. She states that: "The very entry into the cultural field deflects that desire from its original meaning, with the consequence that desire within culture is, of necessity, a series of displacements" (Butler 89). Both Freud and Lacan try to explain how sexual attraction is formed through a metanarrative, but according to Butler, this narrative is biased. She establishes what she refers to as Performativity, linking the development of gender and sexual identity to a repetition of acts that are socially constructed, rather than the notion that associates it with primary psychological drives.

The Freudian notion of sexual development, as presented in his book, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, identifies three stages of development: the oral,

anal, and phallic stage, which ends with an oedipal complex to form a "natural" and socially accepted form of desire (mainly a heterosexual identity). Ben has not gone through these stages in the proper order of Freud's theory. In his Oral stage, which Freud considers to be a crucial psychological stage in the child's sexual development, the sexual activity is inseparable from the ingestion of food. Freud signifies the essence in which a child is fed; he marks this act as a process of identification with the mother (Freud 64). Ben lacks such identification and is always shown to be searching for such an emotional connection. This stage, for Ben, is one of rejection. In *The Fifth Child*, Ben is depicted as a child with fierce teeth that clinch onto his mother's breasts, "Ben roared with rage, fastened like a leech to the other nipple, and sucked so hard she felt that her whole breast was disappearing down his throat […] she cried out, pulling him away" (48). Ben's violence and dominance in this intimate act of nourishment and the rejection he receives imply that his first stage of sexual development has failed to satisfy his needs.

As for his Anal phase, which focuses on the process by which a child learns control and cleanliness, it is also linked to a binary of "masculinity" and "femininity," or passive and active impulses, which shape the gender identity of males and females, according to Freud. For Ben, this phase is a complete failure in terms of its presupposed aims. Freud refers to this stage as a "pregenital" phase. He notes in his lecture, "The Development of the Libido," that this phase indicates a "precursor of the sexual polarity", that he comments on as follows: "What appears to us as masculine in the activities of this phase, when we look at it from the point of view of the genital phase, turns out to be an expression of an instinct for mastery which easily passes over into cruelty" (Freud, *Introductory Lectures* 327). Freud does not explicitly refer to gender identity here, but he observes a sense of activity through the control of the anal digestion and excretion. Failure in this phase could lead to aggressive behaviour.

In one critical moment of the novel, *The Fifth Child*, the result of all the neglect and maltreatment that Ben has endured is revealed in a brutal scene, the time when his mother attempts to rescue him from the institution, which depicts a sound representation of human failure for both his parents and community: "He was naked, inside a strait-jacket. His pale yellow tongue protruded from his mouth. His flesh was dead white, greenish. Everything—walls, the floor, and Ben—was smeared with excrement. A pool of dark yellow urine oozed from the pallet, which was soaked" (76).

This scene is interpreted through Freudian analogy as an anal-expulsive resolution of this stage; however, Ben diverges from such analysis as he has not passed this stage socially or symbolically.

Ben does not conform to this notion of activity and passivity; his acts are active but not socially motivated, and they are difficult to measure through an accepted structure of human behaviour. The description of his tendency towards violence, as displayed in the novel, detaches him from any social context. This disintegration from society amplifies his abjection, as he is stigmatised to be an "animal", "monster", and alien, all of which portray him as the ultimate form of the Other. Freud interprets an infant's acts as taking on new forms of expression, "an instinct for mastery which easily passes over into cruelty" (Freud 327). Ben's dominance is non-symbolic, defies social norms, and his reactions are instantly "destructive" due to his lack of control.

The last stage of sexual development (phallic phase) is resolved through an Oedipal Narrative. Freud's Oedipus complex is a model of children's sexual development; it is inspired by Sophocles' epic *Oedipus Tyrannus.* In Freud's model, the child desires one parent, the parent of the opposite sex, and identifies with the other, the same sex parent, leading to a form of hostility and competition, similar to the epic; kill the father and marry the mother (Lear 179). The Oedipus complex is a key process in the Phallic stage, which, through its resolution, contributes to the formation of a gender identity. The success of this process marks a stable identity for the child and represses what Freud refers to as "forbidden" desires (incest, homosexuality, etc). The father's role is to exercise authority, and by accepting this familiar structure, the child becomes a subject.

The phallic phase is absent for Ben, as he has no sense of identification with his father. The novel expresses this idea since the beginning of Ben's infancy, as argued in the first chapter of this thesis. In *The Fifth Child*, Ben's father states his rejection of his newborn baby, and he explicitly says it when Harriet asserts the idea for him while they are discussing sending him to the institution. His answer: "… 'No, he's not,' said David, finally. 'Well, he certainly isn't mine'" (Lessing 69). David does not recognise Ben as his child, and he is abandoned by his mother as well, which breaks any ties he has with both parents. As a result, his ability to identify with either parent is lost. He is left outside the Oedipal phantasy and the symbolic structure of subject formation.

The Oedipus complex is resolved through repression and identification in the Freudian narrative; however, Lacan reinterprets this narrative with a focus on language structures rather than family dynamics. The individual identity is a product of language and paternal law (a patriarchal law). What he coined as "the name of the father" is thoroughly examined in a different stage of sexual development, the mirror stage; this stage is unlike Freud's three phases, a symbolic one, in which the child enters into the symbolic order. In his essay, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I," Lacan describes this stage as a drama that results, after a series of phantasies, in the first formation of the "self", moving from a sense of fragmentation to an image of wholeness (Lacan 3). This process, as seen by Lacan, is a significant experience that can shape the child's identity. Ben, as argued in the previous section, has not entered into the symbolic order, as this process of identification has been forcibly shattered through a series of rejections in his childhood; moreover, there has been no replacement or compensation for the mother or father figure in his life to build upon it an identification pattern.

Ben's failure to become part of a societal structure in the sense that is observed through symbolic theories of psychoanalysis, those which involve sexual narrative or fantasies, requires the presence of a structure that a child takes part in as a subject. Being in an abject or othered state, it is essential to perceive Ben through a psychoanalytical lens, drawing on Kristeva's notion of semiotics; moreover, studying his reaction through an analogy that addresses his unique behavioural traits and circumstances. Julia Kristeva builds upon Lacan's idea of the Semiotic. In her book, *Revolution in Poetic Language*; she explains: "The semiotic is articulated by flow and marks: facilitation, energy transfers, the cutting up of the corporeal and social continuum as well as that of signifying material, the establishment of a distinctiveness and its ordering in a pulsating chora, in a rhythmic but non expressive totality" (Kristeva 40). Kristeva views the semiotic as a fluid flow of energy that is independent of social structure. This idea of fluidity distinguishes the semiotic from the symbolic, using non-verbal and emotional communication rather than a language structured by society. This form of expression is significant when linked to Ben's behaviour as his reactions are not of a clear motive or goal; they are, on the one hand, instinctual, but on the other hand, they express a deeply disturbed and fragmented self.

In his adult life, Ben encounters many women, and he is a relatively heterosexual male. He expresses strong sexual desire towards women that is marked

by a need for attachment and "love"; however, the way he refers to and interprets this affection is not through symbolic language, which indicates that Ben's perception of emotions in not romantic or structured through any social view or cultural dynamic or intuition. Ben always reacts positively to words of appreciation: "You are a good boy" (32). He answers not through language but just by forming an instinctual gesture, "Tears came into his eyes and she heard him give a sort of bark…he wanted to say thank you" (32). Ben tries to thank her but lacks the means to show his gratitude. A complex relationship exists between the semiotic and symbolic orders in this emotional scene.

In examining the second time Ben has experienced a sexual interaction with Rita, the integration of the semiotic and symbolic behaviour of Ben is shown more vividly: "The second occasion was like the first. This time he did it once and she was disappointed, […] it was too short. She told him so […] He understood what she was saying, with his mind at least, and he let his trousers drop, and allowed her to manipulate him. Because this act was so soon after the first, he managed to keep going, and listened to her cries, with curiosity and surprise" (36). Ben, in this sexual encounter, displays more details about his level of comprehension. Ben does not understand the meaning of the words spoken by others, yet he is not completely disconnected from language; he is learning how to deal with language without making sense of it, which puts him in a state outside the symbolic order but not in the semiotic realm.

The semiotic realm is a state of the body in a pre-linguistic part of the mind, centred on rhythmic drives and non-material elements. In Kristeva's theory, the child expels himself from the maternal body, linking him to the semiotic; this process aids him in the formation of his individual and distinct identity. Julia Kristeva associates the formation of identity to a process of Abjectifaction:

> Along with sight-clouding dizziness, nausea makes me balk at that milk cream, separates me from the mother and father who proffer it. 'I' want none of that element, sign of their desire; 'I' do not want to listen, 'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it. But since the food is not an 'other' for 'me,' who am only in their desire, I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish myself. (Kristeva 3)

Kristeva illustrates her concept of Abjection as a process. In the rejection of food by children, the example of a child avoiding milk demonstrates how expulsion of the self from foreign objects and those perceived as impure establishes boundaries between the

self and the Other. However, in the case of Ben, he fails to establish himself as a subject who represses the maternal figure. In this sense, Ben is in a state of abjection; both symbolic and semiotic are inaccessible. He is in a pre-symbolic yet transitional state between the two orders of signification. As a result, Ben cannot form a stable identity, making him an embodiment of the abject, which is neither subject nor object. The rejection and exclusion he faces are due to his threatening nature to these categories, where the boundaries of identity, self, and other are distorted or unclear. Ben's existence is unstable, disturbed, and impossible to fit into any structure of identity constructed by social norms.

This extended discussion of Ben's behaviour from a psychoanalytical framework confirms his circumstances as the "Other" since he is clearly in a state that is ultimately unintelligible within these models of signification. Referring back to Judith Butler's concept of performativity, her theory provides a model for understanding Ben's position. The theory of performativity, as coined by Butler in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, is a process of identity formation that she explains as follows: "Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts. The effect of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self" (Butler 191).

This quote provides a clear definition of Butler's notion of performativity, which believes that gender is not a fixed truth but a repetition of social acts and norms. Butler's notion of performativity sees gender as a series of repeated acts that are constructed by society. Ben is not portrayed as part of Butler's performance framework. The repeated gestures of Ben, marked by violence, aggression and physical expression of power, stand for the preformed identity that he has mastered to the point it secures him a place in society. Still, they are masculine (toxic masculine). Those acts are a reaction to the neglect of his family and the stigmatisation he endured from his community.

As an Othered individual, Ben is familiar with how different he is. This recognition of his position is confirmed in several instances of his narrative, such as his visit to the zoo: "Ben had known this was meant to be a monkey. He had visited the zoo, moving from cage to cage looking at beasts whose names he had been called,

ape, baboon, pig-man, pongo, yeti. There was no yeti in the zoo, nor a pongo either, and he had wondered about them, for he knew he was looking for something like himself (28). Ben has always been stigmatised as a "monster" or an "animal". In his belief that he is searching for "something like him", he searches for a socially constructed identity based on a stigma, an "animalistic" prescriptive role. In this sense, Ben's identity is formed by a process that aligns with the concept of performativity, but his performance is unintelligible; his persona does not follow a form of linguistic recognition (a symbolic identification). Still, he needs his performance to be accepted by others; that is why he tried to please Rita, "He was pleased, that he pleased her" (36). This action implies an ongoing effort to secure acceptance.

As for Ben's performance of the sexual act, when he acts upon the "Animalistic" identity that he has acquired, he has also faced rejection before just for being "himself". In his teenage years, Ben is the leader of a gang, and he controls them because of his sheer physical power and "dominance." When it comes to his sexual experiences during his stay with the gang, he has failed in acting the proper feelings due to his intuition with violence and dominance being the only form of expression he knows: "When he was the leader of the gang of boys, the bad boys that everyone was afraid of, there had been girls, and one liked him. She had tried to change him saying, 'But Ben, let's try it this way, turn round, it's not nice what you do, it's like animals.' […] After some attempts she would not see him again, and the word had gone around among the girls that Ben was funny" (35). Ben's performed identity is not adherent to a social structure, so for his peers or any potential female partner, it is incomprehensible.

In Performativity, the subject is expected to follow social rules and norms to display an accepted gender identity, marked in patriarchy with women having a passive role (gentle, obedient, and soft); men, on the other hand, are assertive and active (dominant, rational, and physically powerful). Ben's gender identity follows a defective version of such social roles; his performance has not been efficient, as he lacks awareness. Accordingly, his act is random and driven by instinctual and primal fears, a need to survive and belong. Through Butler's theory, Ben's behaviour is interpreted to have the traits of a gendered identity; he is not devoid of individuality. This perception of Ben implies that his sexual desire is just a primitive arousal by seeing an object of

sexual stimulation (a female object) and an attachment that aligns with his intuition in his teenage days with the gang.

3.3 The Other and Others, Unnamed and Unseen: The Impossibility of Mutual Recognition and Social Failure:

When Ben is observed beyond the lens of gender identity and his desire to belong to a familiar structure, which is primarily portrayed in his longing to form attachments with maternal figures or through expressions of sexual desire, Ben's circumstances reveal an intense existential dilemma. As the ultimate Other, he lacks the recognition essential for subjectivity, resulting in an inability to experience, understand, or even imagine the essence of love. Throughout the novel, Ben is perceived only as a non-recognisable figure, an "animal," "alien", and "monster", all of which are marked with a mix of fear and curiosity. His relationship with Rita is not an exception:

> She had met many different kinds, but nothing like Ben. He was outside anything she had been told about, or seen on the television, or knew from experience. When she saw him naked for the first time, she thought, Wow! That's not human. It was not so much the hairiness of him, but the way he stood, his big shoulders bent — that barrel chest — the dangling fists, the feet planted apart … She had never seen anything like him. And then there were the barking or grunting roars as he came, the whimpers in his sleep — yet if he wasn't human, what was he? A human animal, she concluded, and then joked with herself, Well, aren't we all? (38)

Rita shares the perception of Ben being a "nonhuman" figure; however, her perception of him is not rooted in fear of the unknown, but rather in a fascination evoked by his physically unique characteristics: "That's not a human". Rita's use of language to express her astonishment at this unusual "creature" of a man and the description in animalistic terms implies that Rita also stigmatises Ben, contributing to his "othered" state. While she does not reject, she places him in the realm of her objectivity; he is an object of desire for Rita, not a subject.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas perceives language as a tool to construct objectivity. Objectivity goes beyond the use or possession of objects, but through language, it can become a theme shared with the Other and become meaningful and communicable (209). The Process of naming and categorising, possessing it, is not enough for it to be a tangible reality for the Other. While Rita's intentions are not to use or hurt Ben and express an effort to "accept" that he is different: "A human animal, she concluded, and then joked with herself, Well, aren't we all?" (38). She unintentionally reduces him to an object for her pleasure. If she

generally perceives Ben as an object, a person she can recognise and connect with, then she would have encountered his "unidentifiable" nature and respond to him in a manner that addresses his vulnerability without the need to categorise and name him.

Rita is also an "Othered" figure herself; the marginalisation that Rita experiences is systematically constructed by her position as a woman (gendered Otherness) and as a sex worker (social Otherness). Rita suffers from exclusion, objectification, and emotional neglect, which is akin to Ben's circumstances, reflecting on the position of women who are trapped in a vulnerable position to survive. In the novel, when she reminisces about her past, she describes herself with emotional and physical distress: "Her skin was bad. Her hair when not dyed silver-blonde was a coarse limp black mess: you had only to touch it to know she was sick" (48). This self-loathing and hatred imply a lack of self-recognition and a negative perception of herself. This form of self-abjection results from her circumstances as the Other in her community, which is displayed by the way she applies her makeup in a hurry to avoid facing herself; the self that mirrors how people view a "prostitute", a stigmatisation that also makes her an object for her community.

Rita's social position as a sex worker and the anxious feeling she expresses towards her body demonstrate Simone de Beauvoir's argument in her book *The Second Sex*. According to de Beauvoir, throughout history, the state of women has been constructed as an object of desire and dominance for men, lacking subjectivity, and her role in society is framed as an Other, not equal to or a peer (275). Rita embodies the Other by patriarchal standards, which views her as inferior to men just because of her gender. Her social position as a sex worker intensifies this otherness, as she defies the norms of femininity in its passivity and modesty; a sex worker is violating the roles of male complete dominance over the female body, where their agency is limited to a "man's decision". When she uses her body as a form of labour, she secures a quasi-sense of control beyond the approved standards of the patriarch. While Rita attempts to reclaim her agency by using her body, she is still taking part in the patriarchal structure that reduces her to a sexual figure to be consumed, an object of desire rather than a subject of worth.

Rita's lack of subjectivity is defined by her relationships with men: Johnathon, her boyfriend, and Ben, a young man with whom she explores sexual desires. She is deprived of the opportunity to act upon her individuality and express her needs, goals,

feelings, and expectations in life and relationships. Rita explicitly confirms her dependency on a male figure: “She supposed she could say Johnston was her man: she didn’t have another, after all” (48). In this quote, the vulnerability of Rita’s identity appears in a passive acceptance of Johnston as her “man”; he is the patriarchal male figure through whom she observes the world. Being with him is not a choice; it is a form of attachment that discloses an internal conflict towards her self-validation.

De Beauvoir explains on the concept of immanence: “In fact, every existent is simultaneously immanence and transcendence; when he is offered no goal, or is prevented from reaching any goal, or denied the victory of it, his transcendence falls uselessly into the past, that is, it falls into immanence; this is the lot assigned to women in patriarchy” (276). In this passage argues that women are denied the opportunity to exercise “free choice,” to act, unable to affirm themselves as full subjects. De Beauvoir refers to this passive condition as “immanence”, a state of being in which women live for others, not themselves, denied the right to reach their goals, where they lack the transcendence of an independent self, and falls into the past (276). Rita surrenders her subjectivity in exchange for security in her relationship with Johnathon. Her goal is to support him in his ambitions, disregarding her own desires.

The psychological state of Rita is characterised by depression and trauma, which is not explicitly stated in the novel, but hinted at through an implied long-lasting effect of marginalisation, rejection and emotional abuse that she has endured throughout her life. This state approximates to what Julia Kristeva describes in her concept of Melancholia. The theory explores an internal complex which is rooted in the inability to grieve loss or trauma. Manifested by the “Thing” that she interprets as in Black *Sun: Depression and Melancholia,* an absence that devastates the subjects, haunts and forms its emotional identity, this concept provides a strong lens to recognise Rita’s emotional trauma and how it drives her relationship with Ben. Rita’s deeply wounded ego is marked by self-loathing, detachment, and a fragile sense of self. She lacks the symbolic means to express her suffering, for her condition is deeply engraved in her identity, which defines a fractured and passive existence. Without the will to change this reality, she remains in a state of melancholia, unable to move past her trauma.

Rita’s melancholic state offers a demonstrative example of this internal crisis explored by Kristeva: “And it was true, he had been good to her. And what he said was true, that

she hated this life and had thought of doing herself in several times. 'Better do myself in before some sex maniac does it for me.' She knew she probably wouldn't last long, anyway" (48). Rita expresses her feelings in a language that implies disturbance and is unclear about what she truly wants from her life. She is entirely detached from her body and views her existence as worthless and of no value to herself or others. This casual talk about ending her life with disregard for her human significance shows a deeply abjectified sense of being. While this tendency to "do herself" reflects a destructive nature, it is also a desire for control over her physical existence or lack thereof.

This destructive drive is embedded in Rita's inability to use language of expression, mirroring the contradiction between the rejection of others and the strong dependency and need for a figure of attachment, mainly men, in the case of Rita. She attaches herself to Johnathon in a toxic relationship, knowing that, profoundly, this is eradicating her already broken self. Johnathon takes on the role of the "Thing" in Rita's narrative, he is "her man", and this label is conveyed through compulsive attachment that compensates for what she cannot express: "The premature being that we all are can survive only if it clings to another, perceived as supplement, artificial extension, protective wrapping. Nevertheless, such a life drive is fully the one that, at the same time, rejects me, isolates me, rejects him (or her)" (Kristeva 15). Johnathon functions as this "protective wrapping". Rita has not formed a genuine relationship with him due to affection, but rather because of the temporary feeling of recognition he provides her. While this affiliation she has with Johnathon maintains her stability and survival, it prevents her from confronting her trauma, which is where Ben fits into this calculation. In contrast to Johnathon's role, Ben offers an alternative to this equivalence to attachment through complete dominance and dependency.

Ben cares for Rita; the recognition of her existence that he provided stems from gratitude for a friend: "Rita was not a mother or a partner just a friend: 'A dread was seizing Ben, a cold pain. He had had one refuge, one real friend — Rita. She was gone'" (60). Recognising Rita as his only real friend is more symbolic for her than the temporary sexual pleasure they had. The bond they have formed is not placing her in a passive state, but she is actively caring for another person. Ben does not substitute what she lacks; he is a "projection" of her otherness, an instrument of meaning to her suffering, yet her melancholic condition limits her ability to secure the connection she

has made with Ben. She "expels" him within Kristeva's framework of melancholia. Even if it has not been her intention to end their relationship this way, abandoning Ben. Her fear of getting too close controls her actions and, in turn, frames him as another embodiment of the "Thing" that is both a source of comfort and danger.

As Rita and Ben live in a state of the abject in their community, mutual recognition is observed in this relationship. Rita recognises Ben as an ethical subject, in Levinas terms; she cares for him but uses his passive presence to her benefit and pleasure. The critical moment of abandonment of this unbalanced arrangement, which they had as a form of a situationship or sexually driven relationship (Friends with benefits), reveals Rita's inability to commit to Ben. It has a shattering impact on Ben's fragile sense of belonging. For a brief period, Ben has felt that he feels right in someone's life; however, Rita is not in a state to mention such a relationship, where she is a subject to someone after adapting to a life of objectification by others, and even with Ben, she reacts to his recognition through a physical, non-verbal connection.

In Emmanuel Levinas's notion of totality, this action, Rita's withdrawal, symbolises an ethical failure. Ben, as the Other, requires ethical recognition; he needs Rita to remain with him. By eventually feeling burdened by his presence, Rita stops perceiving him as a subject, which reduces the chances of "infinity" in their relationship. "Infinity is characteristic of a transcendent being as transcendent; the infinite is the absolutely other. The transcendent is the sole ideatum of which there can be only an idea in us; it is infinitely removed from its idea, that is, exterior, because it is infinite" (Levinas 49). This quote emphasises the state of Ben as an ultimate Other, which, even if perceived temporarily as a Subject, remains beyond comprehension. The Other embodied in Ben for Rita is, in this sense, still intolerable, not to be entirely accepted and absorbed by her, and only fits in her life as an Object.

Ben is an Object to others; they have tried to exploit him in several ways and manipulate his need for recognition to persuade him on a path that serves their goals. This exploitation of Ben is summarised in a short argument between Rita and Johnathon: "… 'Don't you see, Reet, he'll end up behind bars anyway.' He meant prison, but Rita heard something else, which Johnston had mentioned during a discussion about Ben: one day the scientists would get their hands on Ben. Rita shrieked at Johnston that he was cruel. She insisted that Ben was nice, he was just a bit different from other people, that's all" (40). The narrative hints, here, to a dread reality

that Ben experiences; he is fated to have a tragic ending where he will always be "caged". Ben is not seen as a person that fits in a social or human structure, he is an "alien" for his world.

Johnathon perceives in Ben a business opportunity for his drug-smuggling business; he wants to make use of Ben's unique appearance to confuse and distract the airport's authorities so they do not find the drugs he has hidden in Ben's luggage and clothes. Johnathon forges a fake passport for Ben as part of his scheme, framing him as a British Actor: "Ben looked out of the ordinary, but you expected pop stars and actors to look amazing. No, it was a brilliant strategy. In a crowd of film people or the music scene, Ben would not be so conspicuous" (43). Neither Johnathon nor Rita perceives Ben to have acquired such "cool" traits associated with a "pop star". They need him to act in this role to achieve their goal (mostly Johnathon's). This new identity is forced upon Ben out of compulsion; he needs a social identity (ID or birth certificate) to be part of society. The importance of these documents is introduced to Ben by Ms Biggs (the old woman) so that he can get unemployment benefits.

Ben reacts to his new passport with confusion: "The passport, when he was given it, surprised Ben. He was thirty-five years old, it said. He was a film actor: Ben Lovatt" (39). Ben knows that he is not thirty-five, nor is his address in Scotland. Nevertheless, he is cheerful about the passport, as the significance of such documents or lack thereof is incomprehensible to him; he only knows that he needs it. Ben does not know the essence of his role as an "actor", and there is no acting in his behaviour; he is only an actor in the eyes of others, who are building a diverse number of assumptions in line with his oddity, silence and physical attributes: "One said that he had been in a mental hospital, he was a rich person, and had been sent here with a minder. Another said he was obviously a heavyweight wrestler. A third believed some experiment had gone wrong in a laboratory, and said Ben gave her the creeps. All were protective of Ben, helped him with advice" (64). People accept and are amazed by the "fake" Ben, while the "real" Ben has never gained the chance to be seen, acknowledged or recognised to establish a secure position of subjectivity.

The identity imposed upon Ben demonstrates Franz Fanon's notion of the colonised subject, introduced in his book Black Skin, White Masks. Fanon's theory suggests that the fantasies and expectations of others substitute for a subject's authentic identity. Reflecting on his experience as a "black man" amid his psychoanalytic career

in France and Colonial Algeria, where he has to witnessed racism and marginalisation: "I [Fanon] was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetichism, racial defects, slave-ships, and above all else, above all: 'Sho' good eatin'" (Fanon 85). Affected by colonial perception and imagination, which renders him a primitive and monstrous creature (Tom-Tom, Cannibalistic) or fascinated by sexual stereotypes to become an object of fetishism, Fanon is, in this sense, reduced to an object, deprived of his subjectivity.

As for Ben, in his experience with Johnathon, his true essence, an identity that is yet to be realised, is deprived of a chance to surface and replaced by a carefully tailored "outfit," not to help Ben be recognised, but on the contrary, to hide his and trick the system into accepting him: "There in Ben's pocket was a passport, with his name in it, and an identity. He was Ben Lovatt, and he belonged to Great Britain which for him until now had been words, a sound, nothing real. Now he felt as if arms had been put around him" (40). This new identity petrifies Ben, as he seeks comfort in the attention of others and clings to his fake identity, fearing that without it, he will return to a state of unrecognised existence in society.

Franz Fanon comments on the people's struggle for objecthood when facing racial discrimination as follows: "I came into the world imbued with the will to find a meaning in things, my spirit filled with the desire to attain to the source of the world, and then I found that I was an object in the midst of other objects. […] But just as I reached the other side, I stumbled, and the movements, the attitudes, the glances of the other fixed me there, in the sense in which a chemical solution is fixed by a dye" (Fanon 82). This quote illustrates Fanon's idea of the "look" and how the gaze of the coloniser places him in a passive stat. He is unable to initiate his next movement and stumbles to gain back his freedom and subjectivity. Ben's sole existence depends on that gaze of the Other. This identity does not equip Ben with a sense of self-recognition; it is a misrecognition that deepens his position as the Other, rather than resolving it.

In South America, Rio de Janeiro, the final place he visits in the narrative, Teresa and Ben meet with Inez, a friend of Teresa; she is the daughter of a university professor and works as an assistant in a science laboratory. With the aim discovering more about Ben's "unusual" nature, Teresa connects the two, and as Inez observes Ben immediately recognises his divergent: "Inez knew she was being deceitful, but her

education had taught her that truth, scientific truth, was more important than anything else […] 'having a look' at Ben would not be the end of it, but she felt powerful and useful, introducing this creature who was obviously a kind of scientific enigma, to someone who could solve it" (93). After all the performances and masks that Ben forcefully adopts for his "true self" to be hidden from others, and for him to gain respect and recognition, his attempts fall short in delivery. Inez's gaze reduces Ben back to a state he has always occupied. Since childhood, Ben has been perceived as an alien, a monstrous entity, or, as she frames it, "a biological enigma". Inez only views Ben as a figure to study; in her eyes, he is not a human being.

Ben moves gradually from the enthusiasm to discover more about himself and if there are people similar to him (his people), to being the object of a science experiment that further abuses his body and degrades his humanity. Inez's perception of Ben is rooted in a social and colonial otherness of a figure whom she views as being less human, so she justifies reducing his humanity in the pursuit of "truth", even if it means betraying a friend, Teresa: "She did not say any of this to Teresa, who knew she was being lied to, and that Inez's cool smiling face was suddenly that of an enemy. Their friendship died at that moment" (93). The mentality in which Inez finds her excuse for such betrayal aligns with Fanon's notion of "the look". In his theory, Fanon explains that the colonial subject finds in his objects a passive presence, an accessory for their world, and they are denied participation in: "The object is denied in terms of individuality and liberty… The Other comes on to the stage only in order to furnish it" (164). For Inez, Ben is not a part of this world or of the individuals she views as "human"; he is only an instrument in her search for knowledge.

A sound example of this objectivity is Inez's disintegration of Ben from the sphere of communication. While they undergo the required tests for their study at the institution, Inez does not try to converse with him about what she needs him to do: "Inez asked Teresa to ask Ben if he had had ear tests, and Teresa said, 'Why not ask him yourself?'" (100). Ben is increasingly rendered a passive sense of being, where he lacks a voice or agency. In this passivity, he delinked himself from his previous performative acts that had helped him adapt to his dire circumstances as the other.

This final state of Ben is marked by complete submission and a lack of recognition. Ben's failure to perform or be assigned a new role and keep the fragile "recognition" to secure a place in the social structure of normalcy removes him from existence. As

Judith Butler argues, in *Bodies that Matter*, a body without reason for its subject cannot perform its function and is dematerialised, rendering it in a state of crisis (Butler 22). Butler's argument on the lack of reason and how it affects the material existence of a subject is an example of a failed performance or an error in the performative process which leads to an erasure of subjectivity. This lack of reason is the case for Ben, as he cannot maintain the prescribed role forced upon him by Others; he is left in a state of abjectification that he has occupied as part of his material existence since the beginning of his journey, from childhood to adulthood.

3.4 The Only Space Left: Subjectivity, Recognition, and the Return to the Womb:

Ben retreats to a passive state after his experience in the institute of South Africa; Teresa and a friend of hers Alfredo, in their attempt to rescue Ben, they found him in a cage, stripped down of his clothes to an inhuman condition, just a like an "animal," Teresa is shocked by Ben's state: "… 'Be quiet, Ben,' whispered Teresa. 'We're going to take you away.' His eyes — what was wrong with them? In the feeble light they seemed like dark holes, but they were blanked out with terror and misery" (111). Ben's empty eyes signal a complete collapse in his subjectivity. In contrast to his childhood reaction in *The Fifth Child*, where he displays a violent resistance to his mother's rescue from yet another institution, a place where he had endured physical and mental abuse, Ben in *Ben, in the World* does not show a will to survive; he is devoid of meaning, in a place beyond the symbolic order, murmuring hollow cry, symbols his departure into pure abjection.

This departure is not only due to this dire ending, but it is the result of a series of repetitive cycles that have begun with Ben losing his primary caregiver, his mother. However, he continues to yearn for a substitute for the safety and comfort he once had under the roof of his childhood home. Each encounter begins with a potential recognition yet is resolved with a dissatisfactory exclusion. The novel summarises this unavoidable cycle in an early critical moment of detachment. Ben receives the news of Mrs Biggs' death: "Richard told Ben that Mrs Biggs was dead, and Ben sat unmoving, silent, staring" (61). This reaction of silence marks the first instances of his downfall. At this moment, Ben is only acquainted with Richard, a man of no significance to him. He thinks of his journey so far, as a mechanism to calm himself,

yet what he encounters is the betrayal of his family: “He was thinking of Mrs Biggs’ room, where he had been happy, looking after her, of Rita, who had been kind, and then of his own home, but as soon as he imagined his mother, he saw, too, that scene where she had sat on the park bench and patted it so that Paul could come and sit by her” (61). The flow of thoughts in Ben’s mind implies an act of psychic return.

Ben recalls in this moment the most significant attachment figures of his journey: Ms Biggs, the woman who has taken care of him and occupies a maternal role in his life; Rita, the kind friend whom he builds a strong sexual and maternal connection with; his childhood home, the place which he always yearns for and has not yet found a compensation to its loss; and finally his mother, the primary attachment figure of who has betrayed and abandoned him, replacing him by Paul, a brother that has never liked him. This last image, which enrages Ben, his mother, who is patting the bench for Paul to come closer to her, emphasises the exclusion he feels in this world. These reminiscences are not nostalgic, but rather a symbol of his regression, as explained in Freud’s notion of the death drive.

In “Beyond the Pleasure Principle,” Freud argues that life is controlled by what he coined the pleasure principle, the drive towards survival and adaptation to life, the life drive (Eros), and another interrelated force that is primarily functional in all living organisms, the death drive (Thanatos); it is a tendency to return to a state of tensionless pre-subject state, a state of non-existence. Sigmund Freud describes the relationship between the death and life drives as follows: “The life drives behave as troublemakers and constantly bring tensions, the resolving of which is perceived as pleasurable, whereas the death drives appear to do their work unobtrusively. The pleasure principle seems to be positively subservient to the death drives” (Freud 140). In his description, Freud stresses that the death drive is not an openly active force at all times but a silent one working in the shadows and slowly moving through life. While the pleasure principle seeks to avoid pain and prolong life, the death drive pushes the subject toward a regression and erasure of subjectivity.

Freud’s description of the death drive as a silent force works quietly without the person noticing a change; it is stronger in its effect than the pleasure principle. Ben has been seeking recognition and a sense of belonging through his attempts to find a female figure to compensate for the absence of his mother. Ben makes a genuine effort to adapt and form connections with people, mainly to survive, which creates “tensions”

that are to be resolved in pleasure, following the notion of the life drive through recognition and belonging. With the failure to produce real attachments resulted in a series of rejections, and he remains an "abandoned child", an abject figure with unbearable presence; moreover, his struggle to adapt by constituting performative acts (masculine performance) to secure a gender identity and his compulsory false social identity, also consequence to a tragic resolve in a tendency for stillness and tensionless passive withdrawal towards non-being.

Sigmund Freud's theory of the Pleasure Principle offers a structure to understand the repetitive nature of the psychic life; it is demonstrated through Ben's struggle to find a substitute for his primary caregiver, his mother, Harriet, an attachment figure who has not, in essence, recognised Ben. In Ben's narrative, these relationships are constructed through endless cycles of interactions. According to Freud, there is a tendency to seek pleasure and avoid unpleasure, marked by repetitive behaviours that aim to restore a primitive state of satisfaction. Freud describes the compulsory repeated actions and events in children as an effort to take command of their lives. Through this repetition of unpleasant events, they revisit what they had experienced as passive recipients. In *Ben, in the World*, Ben is experiencing an endless loop of repetitive efforts to secure attachment, recognition, and a sense of belonging. Each of these connections partially succeeds, providing only temporary comfort, not lasting pleasure, which results in a greater emotional collapse when those connections diminish. Therefore, when these repetitions do not restore Ben's pleasure (life drives), they progressively move him towards a symbolic disappearance (death drives).

The repetitive process is essential to the pleasure principle; the repetition of certain comforting and soothing behaviours, actions, and relationships helps maintain psychic stability. When Ben is abandoned by his family, he is left in a vulnerable state; this absence of a maternal figure tends to establish in Ben a lack that he is unable to fill and a feeble social position for him to survive. Therefore, he searches for a female figure to substitute for his mother. In Ben's reaction to the scar made by his mother's rejection, he starts to form patterns of repetitive attachment-oriented actions that satisfy his life drives by establishing new mother-son relationships. The most significant is the motherly connection he creates with the old woman, Ms Biggs (as discussed in the first section of this thesis). However, their relationship has faced a shifting dynamic of care. Ben's primary need for Ms Biggs is to be a surrogate figure who takes care of

him, but with her being sick, he has to be the one taking care of her: "… 'That's all right then,' said the neighbour, and went off to spread the news that the yeti was looking after Mrs Biggs as if he were her son" (33). This change in relationship dynamics burdens Ben.

Ben has felt a strong connection towards Ellen Biggs, which sparks a sense of responsibility that he is not ready for as an "othered" figure who lacks basic social skills. He goes through a series of repetitive actions as he attends to her; he is the caregiver: "The best in Ben's whole life, looking after the old woman, even taking her clothes and her bedclothes to the launderette, cooking up dishes from frozen to feed her" (33). Ben's sudden modification of roles strengthens his attachment with Ms Biggs, as attachment behaviour, according to John Bowlby, is a series of pleasant trips: "All of us, from the cradle to the grave, are happiest when life is organised as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figure(s)" (Bowlby 62).

This repetitive nature of attachment patterns aligns with Freud's pleasure principle's life drives; Ben seeks attachment to secure his survival, yet when the attachment aims to create tensions as "troublemaking" forces (Freud, Beyond the Pleasure Principle 140), Ben tries his best to retain it: "He was hungry, for he was trying to eat as little as he could. It could not go on. He told her he was going to see about a job, and saw her sad little smile. 'Be careful, Ben,' she said. And Ben left: he had no home in this world" (33). Ben has not abandoned Ms Biggs; she pushes him to leave due to the lack of food and his inability to provide it. When Ben learns of her death, that shatters his attachment, breaks the cycle of the pleasure principle and replaces the life drives with death ones.

In his collapse of attachment, Ben finds another form of repetitive acts, of which he obtains a sense of recognition akin to what he has experienced with the old woman. Ben attempts to perform an "identity" that serves his efforts to belong. Judith Butler's performativity suggests that gender and social identities are formed through a series of repetitive acts. In one scene of Ben's narrative, this performance is demonstrated as Ben tries to mimic the behaviour of a "normal man," which falls short of delivering: "He had wanted to join with them, their jokes, their talk, but did not know how to. He had never understood, for example, why the way he spoke was funnier than the way they did" (28). Ben's confusion implies his frustration in

performing this role and disappointment with the others' reactions. This confusion is also the case when Ben performs the dominant male role in his sexual encounters with Rita; despite his succeeding in building a special friendship that is marked with partial mutual recognition, the divergent nature of Ben has remained a problematic aspect of his performance, resulting in yet another rejection, even if it is not intentional. The complexity of his performance makes it impossible for him to maintain such an identity that adheres to "normalcy".

Ben is trapped in this repetitive loop of performance and attachment, where he sacrifices parts of his a yet fragmented identity; after this dire detachment from Rita he still yearns for similar feelings: "That night he went off into the poorer parts of the town, looking for a girl […] He was thinking of Rita, for now he could remember only kindness" (63). Ben is unbearable when he acts as his "true self", making it easy for others to enforce their perceptions and desired behaviours that they deem normal, perceived in a socially structured manner as productive, and serve the cultural and social goals. To integrate himself into this structure, Ben has accepted being objectified by others and has changed his appearance and character to secure recognition. Franz Fanon describes the colonial subject as "looked in the body", a static state: "There are times when the black man is locked into his body" (Fanon 175), resulting in a never-ending otherness. Ben's experiences align with this concept, as he has always been reduced to an object by others: he is used for drug smuggling, a product of a film that disregards his humanity, and finally, he is utterly devoid of his subjectivity with his body being violated for the sake of a potential scientific breakthrough.

Ben acknowledges that he is being used, but still, he surrenders to the manipulation: "… 'You just do this for me, Ben, that's right, you're doing me a bit of a favour. And I'll be real grateful to you.' These words had had the same effect on Ben as the old lady's, 'You're a good boy, Ben" (60). Ben yearns for words of recognition, as they provide him with brief instances of pleasure, even if formulated in a clear, manipulative manner. Phrases like "You're a good boy, Ben" stimulate his life drive. Ben is desperate for such moments of recognition; the intertwined connections between the pleasure of this false recognition and the pain of rejection afterwards, when he is no longer of use to them, intensify the tensions associated with the life drives. Ben's objectification suddenly collapses when a disturbance in the system that dehumanises him occurs.

This collapse of objectivity is shown in the reaction to the news that Ben is a British citizen: "The laboratory assistant who had tested Ben was shocked […] This yeti, this freak, was a polite sort of creature, almost like ordinary people: he should not be treated like this" (107). The alteration in the narrative of his origin ironically places him back into the social structure and shocks the people who have deemed him a nonhuman figure. This scene expresses the complexity of the process of otherness on both the subject and object of this dynamic. Homi K. Bhabha notes the contradictions that occur in the notion of the "look", in essence, the object acquires traits that allow it to retain its existence to normalcy in the lens of the colonial subject, and he is temporarily recognised as one of them: "The colonizer's invitation to identity: 'You're a doctor, a writer, a student, you're different you're one of us.' It is precisely in that ambivalent use of "different"—to be different from those that are different makes you the same" (Fanon xxviii). Bhabha suggests here that the "phantasy" associated with the othered subject collapses when they are perceived to exhibit behaviours that are different from themselves and represent those who had othered them. Ben is saved from the institution because of this false recognition; however, it does not indicate that Ben has, at that moment, moved past the stigma of the Other. Ben remains in his abject state, as the change is only in his perception of a particular situation, not in Ben's overall subjectivity.

The significant disturbances that shape Ben's life mark a transition to a regression towards the death drives, where the simple concept of pleasure is insufficient and triggers a drive to return to a prior state, a tensionless and stable one, that pre-exists the entry to the symbolic order (Freud 138). For Ben, this "prior state" that he associates with his childhood home and the presence of his mother, which, in essence, has never truly existed. The place he yearns for (his home) is not a safe place, a space of comfort. Nevertheless, Ben continues to engage in this search for attachment and desire, although his attempts are marked with failure. The repetition of this process eventually leads Ben to a loss of meaning and puts him in a melancholic condition due to the tiredness that his psyche has endured.

The end of Ben's pleasure is revealed in his emotional confusion during his stay with Teresa, where he no longer knows which attachment he has to form or performance he needs to act: "Ben had his jacket and trousers off, and what she saw there, in his hand, made her sit up and say sharply, 'No, Ben, no, stop.' He was bending

over her, and she did not know if he intended only to look at her, or […] He straightened, his hand dropping away from a shrinking penis" (123). This act is the last desperate attempt to establish an attachment; it is not guided by pleasure but by an instinctual urge out of his control.

Ben knows that Teresa is not his mother, a friend or a sexual partner; as she verbally rejects him, his reaction is one of shame. He distinguishes that the sexual encounter with Rita is welcoming his body, but Teresa is defensive: "'You should go back to bed, Ben,' she said. He did so, silent, obedient, and lay awake. So did she. He said angrily, 'Rita liked me. She liked me. You don't like me.' 'Yes, I do, Ben. You know I do.' She heard his breathing: it was rather like a child's who is about to burst into tears" (123). The confusion and helpless breakdown of the life drive in this moment, where Ben attempts to assault Teresa, is not out of rage or offence, but an inability to reach any pleasure or satisfaction.

Accordingly, this submission to Teresa's commands in a mute reaction with tears in his eyes illustrates Kristeva's concept of melancholia; it is a condition that arises from a subject's loss and a lack of means of grief and mourning his loss, resulting in a gradual retreat into a state, where he no longer uses symbolic language to express feelings and becomes dead in the psychotic sense, a silence state with a complete loss of communication with the world (Kristeva 42). Ben is unable to connect both sexually and emotionally with others; his subjectivity no longer exists. He resists this endpoint by revisiting the attachments he has formed in the past, and his struggle is exemplified in his speech with Alex, where he repeatedly seeks comfort in memory: "He talked about the old woman, but not about the cat, about Johnston, but not about Rita, because thinking of her made him so sad. He said he had a family but his father hated him and he did not mention Paul, or his mother" (65). These repetitions offer him no comfort; the exclusion of Paul, Rita, and his mother signals the traumatic consequences of repetition without a proper resolution.

The unbearable emotions that Ben is experiencing, as he contemplates his painful experiences, bring into being what Kristeva refers to as the "Thing" (Kristeva 25). The thing for Ben is the product of repressed memories with those whom he could not mourn their loss. Ben's lack of ability to speak partially or completely reflects how his trauma reflects on him internally to the point of psychic death. As Kristeva notes: "Loss entails the loss of my being-and of Being itself" (Kristeva 5). There is nothing

that compensates Ben for his repeated instances of loss and rejection, even his relationship with Teresa and the words of recognition are of insignificance to him: "Ben sat at the table with her, grieving, 'I want to go home.' And sometimes Teresa put her arms round him, 'Poor Ben,' and even, 'You're a good boy, Ben.'" (87). The lack of new attachments and suppression of the older ones indicates a failure in the pleasure principle, a deep regression into a melancholic condition and a movement into non-being, a return to the "womb".

Throughout the novel, *Ben, in the World,* the reversion towards a state of non-being is contemplated by a strong emotional connection to his home, which is later transferred into a depressed search for "his people". Reflecting on Freud's theory of repetition, the regressive tendencies towards collapse are a traumatic outcome of his loss of both subjectivity and objectivity. Since the beginning of his narrative, Ben has struggled with his "subjecthood," as he is an othered figure, and with the repetition of a cycle of loss and rejection, Ben's subjectivity has never been enacted. In addition to that, after being saved from the institution, he is no longer of use to society, and that marks the end of his objectivity; Ben is no longer eligible to function within the realm of objectivity, which relapses him back to the state of abjection he experienced in his childhood. This repetitive loop and its tragic consequence are understood in Freud's observation of trauma: "The patient behaves in a completely infantile manner and thus shows us that the repressed memory traces of his primal experiences are not in an annexed state, indeed are to all intents and purposes incapable of secondary processing" (Freud 112). The increased tension on Ben's mental capacities to process the repetitive failure of attachment and recognition stimulates him to recreate his earliest trauma. The final withdrawal to passivity is a movement from the symbolic world towards the semiotic pre-existence space of the womb.

As argued in the first chapter of this thesis, Ben is rejected by his family and compelled into an abject state; this is the case for Ben until he is abandoned in the "institution". In *The Fifth Child,* Ben is placed in an institution for "abnormal" children, where he is neglected and abused; this experience is resolved as his mother rescues him from the institution and returns him "home". However, the first instance of recognition that he has is not one of the "self" but of his state as the Other, and later he begins this journey for recognition: "Then he came downstairs, darting glances around him to see the enemy before he could be captured again. As he saw it, this

house was where he had been trapped. And by his father. When he first set eyes on David, he backed away, hissing" (Lessing 83). This passage captures Ben's reaction to seeing the father, who has betrayed him for the first time after returning to his house. Through this realisation, he establishes a sense of a fragmented self, yet he lacks subjectivity.

When Ben re-experiences this trauma in another institution, Inez's, he relapses into the infantile state of abjection that he occupies for most of his early childhood. Ben has been betrayed by his family and rejected, which gains him a place in the symbolic order. As a result of this impactful experience, he is temporarily an object that pursues subjectivity, as he is named the "outsider" in his family and socially structured as the "enemy," which briefly interrupts and interprets his abjection. Kristeva, in *The Power of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, argues that a process of rejection, specifically of the maternal body, occurs for the child to enter the symbolic order. Kristeva symbolises this process as an explosion, "I expel myself, I spit myself out, I abject myself within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish myself" (Kristeva 3). Ben does not "expel" himself; he is "expelled" by his family and later by "the world". The first expulsion is a betrayal that he lacks comprehension of, which reduces the impact and paradoxically enacts him into the social order; the second is a shattering erasure that signals his disappearance from the symbolic world.

Ben's journey of returning to the womb's space is summarised in his yearning for a "home", but the excitement of finding people like him, "his people," drifts him away from this unobtainable goal, yet steering him towards the same route. Ben constantly asks the people he meets to help him return home: "… 'When am I coming home?' 'We'll see,' said Johnston, and Rita turned away so Ben would not see her guilty face" (50). No one can help him, as this home of his does not exist. A symbolic retreat to a place of comfort, his parents' house, expressed in Ben's longing to return "home". Nonetheless, Ben acknowledges his differences from his family: Paul, his brother; his father and other siblings; and his mother, Harriet, which implies that his family house is not the "home" that he desires. In the Freudian notion, the return to the womb symbolises for Ben his home (a non-existent space), a final retreat to non-being and nothingness, but this is not entirely the case for Ben.

Bracha L. Ettinger's Matrixial theory offers an alternative space, a divergent retreat to the womb. In her book *The Matrixial Borderspace*, she argues that the womb

is not a biological space associated with tensionless or nothingness but a symbolic and ethical matrix of shared recognition, a trans-subjectivity between the self and the maternal Other, a coexistence of the two, and a partial recognition (Ettinger 65). Ben's search for his people (a "home" where he is accepted) is a search for such a space, a return to this matrixial field. Ben vocalises this yearning in the novel as part of his search for "his people": "… 'I don't have any people. I'm not like my family — at home. They are all different from me. I've never seen anyone like me' …" (96). Ben is deprived of a place in the symbolic order, as he is unable to establish a "self" within "others". Ettinger's concept of returning to the womb through this space is the last chance for Ben; while not a fully established subjectivity, it is not utterly denied one.

The impact of this journey to the womb is hinted at by an emphasis on Ben's realisation of his otherness and difference: At the beginning of the novel, *Ben, in the World*, Ben visits the zoo, where he is seen to be looking for creatures that he believes to resemble him, a "monkey", "Baboon", or even a "yeti": "Ben had known this was meant to be a monkey. He had visited the zoo, moving from cage to cage looking at beasts whose names he had been called, ape, baboon, pig-man, pongo, yeti. There was no yeti in the zoo" (28). Ben is disappointed as he has not find a "yeti," thinking that this is the one creature that is "similar" to him. The yeti is, in this sense, a symbolic representation of his awareness that "his people" are not to be found. Ben things of belonging through a desire to be "named", as his objectivity is the only source of recognition that has secured his survivor, which collapse at the end of the novel after several attempts to belong.

Through Bracha L. Ettinger's matrixial gaze, Ben is not required to align with objecthood; it opens up the possibility of coexistence that Ben has been longing for. In this space, Ben is recognised without dominance; he is not objectified; he witnesses the gaze, becomes part of it. Ettinger argues in her theory a form of shared knowledge that is not necessarily verbal or cognitive: "A noncognitive mode of knowledge is embedded in such a witnessing-together: in wit(h)nessing. Thus we can speak in the matrixial borderspace of a wit(h)ness-Thing that is carried to the screen of vision and appears in the image not behind a veil, but as a veil" (Ettinger 144). This description of the wit(h)ness of a shared gaze between subjects into a space that mutually affects them similar to a veil that transmits and does not block the vision yet does not completely let it through as a form of subjectivity; the "thing" in this notion is through

mutual recognition not through separation or loss such as the case for Lacan and Kristeva's theories. Ben is yearning for people like him, but he needs those people to emotionally connect with him and recognise him without abjection, execution or objectification. He desires a space where he is not studied (objectified) or erased (the traditional womb), he desires, in Ettinger's terms, to wit(h)nessing not witnessing the other(s).

In the novel's final act, Ben is seen dancing under the stars: "… 'They're talking!' he shouted. 'They're singing to us.' Trying to open their minds to what Ben could hear, the three seemed to hear a high crystalline whispering, a tiny clashing, but Ben was exulting […] Later he was quiet, and they went out and saw him standing with his arms outstretched and his head back, silent, looking up, and up" (130-131). Ben obtained a glimpse of this Wi(t)nessing through this awe experience, a moment where he is one and together with the "world". Ben saw his people at that instant and extends it through to the "Others". He invites Teresa, Alfredo, and José to co-presence in this new space of his, but what they could hear was nothing, just a delicate whisper. The significance of this moment is that Ben finally communicates what he feels to others, affecting and influencing them to engage in "his experience". However, they do not fully comprehend what he is trying to communicate to them; he embraces a brief moment of subjectivity, aligning with Ettinger's matrixial borderspace.

This moment of hope signals Ben's final collapse and his death. Ben's final moments finally offer him the state of subjectivity he yearns for, but later fade his being into nothingness. He touches for a few seconds what he has been searching for, "his people": "Now the sun was hard and full on the rock face, and it was crammed with pictures, at least forty of them, and several were like Ben […] Ben stood forward, and stroked the outline of a female who seemed to be smiling at him. Then he bent forward and nuzzled at her, rubbing his beard over her, and letting out short cries that were greetings" (132). In this encounter with what seems to Ben to be people who resemble him, and in his non-verbal expression of joy, Ben enters into Ettinger's matrixial borderspace, where subjectivity appears not in isolation but through shared vulnerability. The images vanish as the sun fades, and this fragile co-emergence is not possible to sustain and shattered to render Ben back to his previous "dehumanised" state of abjectification: "He seemed smaller than he had been, a poor beast. His eyes did not accuse them: he was not looking at them" (133). As a final resolve, Ben chooses

to end his life, a desperate attempt for him not to suffer any more betrayal; his three final companies have also hidden the truth that he will not find "his people".

What Ben has experienced in his tragic fall to his death defines the process of the matrixial borderspace, where co-fading and co-emerging with the other(s) is a fragile being that is never completely established. The matrixial gaze refers to an encounter that is almost realised but not fully reached; this encounter, according to Ettinger, operates through a gaze that functions from within and without to establish a matrixial object, one of shared transmission of "one-less-ness" which results in a partial subjectivity that takes several forms, such as the not-yet-being One-self, the almost-not-being One-self, and the almost-no-more One-self (Ettinger 87). Ben has a glimpse of one of those partial subjective states, an "a/most-missed encounter" that Ben has with what could be his "true self", as he embraces subjectivity, but suddenly collapses, symbolising how fragile this connection is. Ben is left at the end in a state of "Almost-no-more One-self", as a result of the failure of "becoming" a subject. This failure is due to the absence of support from the Other(s), whom Ben trusts in his journey to aid him in this critical moment that was his last hope.

Even in death, Ben is still haunted by otherness, which manifests in those whom he thought of as "friends". The final words of his companions are of dehumanisation and rejection: "Even an animal has the right to commit suicide" (133). In these words, by Alfredo, Ben is stigmatised again as a "monster". Teresa's final words: "We are pleased that he is dead and we don't have to think about him" (134). Teresa's words are cruel and empathic, demonstrating the painful reality of Ettinger's "a/most-missed encounter". Ben is the ultimate embodiment of the abject and Other, whose departure not only does not release him from his otherness but, in the reactions to his death, reinforces this otherness. He lived as the Other and died an "Other" with no one to remember or grieve in a world that only recognises sameness.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has demonstrated that in both Doris Lessing's novels, *The Fifth Child* and *Ben in the World*, the fear surrounding Ben is not due to an innate danger or malicious intentions on his part. Instead, it stems from the way society constantly fails to accept and create space for those who are different. Using theories of psychoanalysis and poststructuralism, particularly those of Julia Kristeva, Bracha L. Ettinger, Emmanuel Levinas, and Judith Butler, the analysis frames the fear of otherness not as a natural or inevitable reaction, but as a systematic social failure to incorporate the Other into the society's norms. The novels do not portray Ben as a materially threatening or physically monstrous figure; on the contrary, he is presented as a relatively ordinary child whose divergent physical and behavioural traits mark him as different. These perceived differences serve to construct his otherness and reinforce the "monster" stigma attached to him from childhood through adulthood. Ben's experience of otherness reveals the profound social consequences of exclusion and marginalisation, and the vulnerable, abject condition into which the nonconforming subject is forced.

Through a close reading of *The Fifth Child* and *Ben, in the World*, this thesis has examined the construction of Ben's otherness. It analyses how the reactions of those around him have intensified the otherness. The first chapter, which focuses on *The Fifth Child*, explores how Ben, a boy with a stigma of being a "monster child", is excluded from the family and deprived of the opportunity to form emotional bonds with his parents and siblings. As a result, he is unable to engage in the natural developmental processes through which one learns to communicate and build a coherent sense of self. Even before his birth, Harriet perceives him as alien and adversarial, while David withdraws from his role as a father, leaving Ben without guidance or emotional support. These dynamics are explored in the novel through Kristeva's notion of the abject, which helps to understand the vulnerable state he occupies within the family. Clare Harvey and Carol Long's writing on "unsharable" motherhood is employed to address Harriet's struggles as the mother who bears the sole responsibility for Ben. At the same time, Kelly Oliver's work on subjectivity is used to understand David's failure to be a father for Ben.

In Lessing's narrative of Ben's childhood, Gothic traditions are reimagined in a domestic setting. Rather than presenting a monstrous figure in nature, Ben is socially constructed as monstrous by the rejection and neglect he suffers. His lack of communication skills and unpredictable reactions stigmatise him, and his abjection reflects the family's need to expel what disturbs their image of normalcy. The traditional Gothic house becomes a modern family house, where the supernatural threat is reinterpreted as the collapse of an idealised family life and the imprisonment and eventual abandonment of one of their own, Ben. Difference becomes the source of fear, a haunted presence within the household, and an abject condition for the Other. The chapters leave Ben in the position of the abject, disrupting the boundaries between human and non-human, self and Other, with no hope of escape or expulsion through which to establish an identity and gain recognition.

In *Ben, in the World*, Lessing's narrative shifts from the domestic sphere to a broader social one. The novel explores Ben's endeavours to form an identity. These attempts are seen in his struggle to connect with people as his parents and community deny him the guidance and intuition he needs to comprehend language, emotions, and the basic social rules that an individual requires to survive. In the second chapter, Ben's relationships, primarily those with female figures, Mrs. Biggs, Rita, and Teresa, are analysed to explore the fragile moments of partial subjectivity that he encounters. Bowlby's attachment theory, Mary Ainsworth's attachment patterns, and Donald Winnicott's concept of the "good enough mother" are used to reveal the roots of Ben's trauma and his yearning for connection. These attachments represent an effort to substitute his primary caregiver and re-establish the comfort and security he believes he once had in his childhood home. However, he fails to maintain any of these attachments due to his abject state and his lack of emotional and cognitive development, as discussed using Sonia G. Austrian's developmental theory.

Ben is used as a drug courier, exploited for scientific research, and forced to perform an identity based on the desires of others, which intensifies his objectification. He forms an attachment with a different female figure, whom he does not entirely perceive as a mother, but more as a friend or a partner. Judith Butler's theory of performativity and Simone de Beauvoir's writing on female sexual objectification are used to examine Ben's violent interaction with Rita, revealing the complete absence of his subjectivity. His actions lack intent and are merely a failed attempt to perform the

masculine identity he has been exposed to. Rita uses Ben to affirm her subjectivity by objectifying him. Emmanuel Levinas's theory of Totality and Infinity is used to explain the dynamic of their relationship: Rita can name and possess Ben, but his abjection blocks the possibility of mutual recognition through language, forming a totality rather than a relation between subjects.

As Ben becomes trapped in a repeated cycle of rejection and abandonment, he is driven toward what Freud, in Beyond the Pleasure Principle, describes as the death drive. Ben is returning to a pre-symbolic, womb-like state marked by stillness and tensionlessness. he gradually becomes inanimate, suspended in a space outside language and recognition. However, as argued in this thesis, he does not entirely lose subjectivity; instead, he attempts to occupy a partial space within it. Drawing on Bracha L. Ettinger's matrixial borderspace theory, Ben's final attempt at connection ends in what Ettinger terms the "Almost-no-more One-self", which is a condition of unresolved subjectivity and failed recognition. The ending of Ben, in the World, where Ben commits suicide, and falls to his death, symbolises not only his final departure from the world but also the society's systematic collapse, which continuously failed to respond to his difference. He disappears without a trace; no one grieves for him, and no one remembers that he existed.

In Lessing's reimagining of the Gothic tradition, the genre evolves to reflect the concerns of contemporary society. Otherness manifests in her narrative through social exclusions and the struggle for belonging, which diverges from the Gothic tradition's focus on supernatural horror and monstrous figures. The thesis traces the genre's evolution from the looming figure of the supernatural unknown to a more psychological externalised threat of social exclusion. The Other is not the primary source of fear. Ben is not the figure that only alarms and fascinates those who encounter him, as the traditional Gothic outsider does, but the system that fails to recognise Ben is the source of horror. Lessing's works thus question the limitations of humanity's tolerance and compassion towards those perceived as different and the Other, and what it means to belong in society.

In conclusion, this thesis has traced, through Ben's narrative, how the evolving Gothic tradition acts as an instrument for cultural and social critique. It exposes the systematic failure of societies to engage with the Other and reveals the devastating consequences of abjection and marginalisation on the individual. Lessing's fiction

challenges contemporary societies in their perception of difference and questions their response when confronted with the fear and anxiety attached to the Othered figure.

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