A Monster Will Help You: Childhood Grief, Healing Nightmares, and Monstrous Wish-Fulfillment in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest*

by

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Denne oppgaven tar for seg ulike debatterte tema innen barnelitteratur, slik som skumle bøker, monstre, sorg, død, traumer, med formålet om å vise hvorfor det er viktig å skape åpenhet rundt disse temaene. Basert på oppdatert teori innen felt som barnesorg, traumer, drømmer, følelser, og monsterteori, vil oppgaven vise eksempler fra litterære verk innen barnelitteratur, som er *A Monster Calls* skrevet av Patrick Ness og *The Nest* skrevet av Kenneth Oppel. Disse bøkene korresponderer med mye av teorien som oppgaven representerer, og slik kan disse bøkene brukes som verktøy for å skape mer åpenhet og kommunikasjon om de nevnte temaene.

I denne oppgaven blir det argumentert for at monstrene i *A Monster Calls* og *The Nest* er til mer hjelp for hovedkarakterene enn hva deres egne foreldre er, og at monstrene dukker opp i drømmene deres med den hensikt at de skal hjelpe hovedkarakterene til å akseptere den vanskelige livssituasjonen de befinner seg i. Hovedkarakterene får lite hjelp og oppfølging fra foreldrene sine, og de er derfor alene med store følelser og kompliserte livssituasjoner hvor trusselen om død henger over dem.

Ved å vise eksempler av hvor og hvordan monstrene hjelper, kan det medvirke til å øke kunnskapen rundt monsteret sin rolle i barnelitteratur og om hvordan denne rollen ikke nødvendigvis alltid må være for å skremme. Som denne oppgaven viser, er både barnelitteratur og monstre mye mer kompliserte enn de ofte blir framstilt.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Monsters are scary.
Monsters contain multitudes.
Monsters are helpful.

However, when clashing with the perceived innocence of childhood, the frightening quality of monsters seem to be intensified. With this thesis I want to illuminate how monsters can be a great literary tool for conveying challenging themes and complex emotions. By analyzing the children's novels *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness and *The Nest* by Kenneth Oppel, alongside an updated account of grief theory, trauma theory, dream theory, and monster theory, I aim to highlight fictional examples of helpful monsters.

I argue that the monsters in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* appear in the child protagonists' dreams as a result of repressed wishes originated in their daytime experiences in an attempt to spark a healing process. The child protagonists are faced with intense emotions because of situations in their daily lives, which will be explained later on, and they do not receive the proper care or support from their caregivers. The monsters therefore show up in their dreams an act of wish-fulfillment in order to heal them.

Children's literature theory

Children's literature is more complex than adult literature in several ways because of its unique position. No other literature is as controlled and catered to as the literature aimed at children, and in comparison to adult literature, it is not controlled by its consumers. Adults are the supervisors of children's literature, even though the literature is created for children, and this cognitive gap has caused many discussions within the field. Some scholars claim that children ultimately make the choice of what they read, and while this is true to some extent, the role and power of adults cannot be ignored in the field of literature any more than it can be ignored in other avenues. It is still adults who control the alternatives the children can choose from. Even if trends are based on what most children read and thus what sells the most (and vice versa), these trends are still grossly generalized and catered toward the idea of the universal child and not the individual. Other scholars, such as Jacqueline Rose, claim that children's literature cannot exist exactly because of the way it is produced. How is it children's literature when children have no say in the creation of it? Which parts of this production belong to the children and the children only? My position on this ends up somewhere in the

middle, where I think children's literature is literature with its main audience being children and thus molded to fit as best as possible within their reality and genre conventions, but still keeping in mind the power-dynamics that happen behind the scenes. The political, ideological, religious, capitalistic, etc., sides of publishing should not be ignored or forgotten. A conspiracy can always be found if one is looking for it, but I would like to believe that most adults within the children's literature industry, whether they be authors, publishers, scholars, teachers, etc., have the best interest of the child in mind, even though some might do it to monetarily exploit children's literature as it is a booming business. Although my thesis does not directly discuss the industry side of things, it is helpful to have this background information in mind when reading papers on children's literature or reading children's literature in general.

Despite the apparent popularity of children's literature within the general population, scholars within the field of children's literature have struggled for decades to have children's literature recognized as something complex enough to be studied at an academic level. Children's literature "is constantly ignored by the world of literary critics, academics, and even by the popular opinion" (Rata 2014: 236), and this overall depreciation implies that because these books are written for children, they are so simple and straightforward that they are not worthy of close readings. In the last fifty years, children's literature critics have attempted to redeem the genre's worth, but the "academic world and most of today literary critics still regard with contempt the genre" (Rata 246). This thesis will provide examples of how complex and multilayered children's books can be, because they absolutely can, and the books I am analyzing are far from the only ones displaying such depth.

By doing an in-depth reading of children's books, one can use said books as a gateway into conversations about taboo themes or other things that are hard to talk about in general, especially with children, such as grief, loss, death, trauma, etc., all themes that are part of the books I analyze in this thesis. Such books are important, and maybe especially so in the times we live in. Having grown up amongst war, terror attacks, school shootings, class imbalances, and now a whole epidemic, children have no choice but to witness death in one form or another. Especially after Covid-19, many children lost people close to them while at the same time being afraid of being infected themselves.

Another heavily debated topic within children's literature is the presence of monsters and scary things in children's literature. On one side supporters state that scary books can help prepare children for the real (adult) world, since scary things are unavoidable, while on the

other side the opponents claim that such books are not appropriate for children because they would destroy and distort the perceived innocence of childhood. But no matter who is wrong or right, the reality is that monsters and childhood go far back, as "there is a long tradition in the history of the field of children's literature of children confronting monstrous horrific beings" (Nodelman 2008: 120). Part of the resistance against monsters in children's literature can be linked to this because, in earlier times, the monster figure was generally included with more didactic intent to scare children into submission. Examples of this are traditional fairy tales and folklore where the child characters often end up in violent situations with a monstrous character, as well as cautionary texts that were written specifically for children which "came into existence at a point when adults decided that children were constituted in a way that required adult interference between them and the horrors of the adult world—as a protective act" (Nodelmann 121). This highlights how "fear and control are partners" (Stevenson 1996: 310), whether employed within or without literature.

The partnership of fear and control continues to be exploited today, but as the definition of children and childhood changed, so did the usage of fear and control. A tendency in children's literature today is to reflect the protective responsibilities of adults—and thus reinforce the child's dependence on adults—by including threats and frightening elements that can only be overcome with the help of adults, as these are "dangers that only adults can defuse" (Stallcup 2002: 127). In this way, adult authority is secured, but "the means of attaining it have been inverted" (Stallcup 126). This does not mean that all children's books follow this model, but oftentimes, without the direct help of adult characters, child characters are shown to develop "adultlike characteristics themselves" (Stallcup 127), which again, albeit more covertly, feature the adult as savior. The balance between the inevitability of children developing into adults and the wish for children to stay in 'childhood bliss' undisturbed by the adult world seems like it cannot be agreed upon, which is reflected by both the disapproval and encouragement of scary books for children.

This debate, as well as the notion of trauma acting as an accelerator for maturation, will be discussed more in depth in chapter one. The issues I want to convey from this section is the long history of monsters in children's literature, the purpose of including scary elements in children's books now and then, as well as the ongoing debate whether such elements should even be included in the first place. I am a supporter of monsters and scary elements in children's literature, and this thesis will show the many functions a monster can have other than simply being frightening. The individuality of children should be taken into account

here, because I do not mean to imply that by 'defending' monsters all children must read scary books. The complexity and duality of monsters will be the topic of chapter three.

Children and childhood are sociocultural concepts which have changed their definitions throughout the decades, often mirroring major social changes, and is therefore "subject to change whenever major social transformations take place" (Christian-Smith & Erdman 1997: 2). Definitions have ranged from children and childhood being perceived as 'little adults' to 'innocent angels that must be protected at all costs', and everything in-between. Innocence continues to be perceived as an essential part of childhood, and "assumptions of purity and innocence are prevalent in modern representations of childhood" (Stallcup 2002: 128). The universalistic approach to children and childhood is problematic, as not all children are the same, yet the term 'children' is frequently used without much consideration of their individuality. I do employ the term 'children/child' throughout my thesis for the sake of simplicity, but this does not mean that all children will fit within the frames I am discussing in relation to categories such as age range, gender, race, social and cultural background, etc. When I refer to children in this thesis, it is not my intent to suggest that my findings and discussions apply to all children.

Similarly to the mutable definition of children and childhood, it is challenging to define children's literature. There is no consensus within the field, even after decades of debating the term by many of the big names, such as Terry Nodelman, Peter Hunt, Karín Lesnik-Oberstein, Jacqueline Rose, Maria Nikolajeva, Kenneth B. Kidd, and so on. As Professor Adrienne E. Kertzer puts it, "children's literature is always growing and changing shape" like the child itself (1984: 12), and this undoubtedly goes hand in hand with the definitions of children and childhood. The scope of this thesis does not allow for an in-depth assessment of the varying definitions of children's literature—or if children's literature even is possible based on the control adults display over the genre—but here I use the phrase 'children's literature', inspired by Terry Nodelman, "to refer to the body of texts […] produced by professional publishing houses: writing for young people by adults" (2008: 3).

Psychoanalysis and Children's Literature

Children's literature studies would not be a thing if it were not for psychoanalysis. But then again, psychoanalysis would be nothing without the child and childhood. In a way, it was the psychoanalytic interest in childhood that in turn "transformed the scene of children's literature" (Kidd 2004: 115). This symbiotic relationship between the child and

psychoanalysis is centuries old, and it was only further affirmed by the emphasis psychoanalysis laid on fairy tales and their many hidden/unconscious implications. With so much psychoanalytic attention directed toward fairy tales, it provided literature thought as meant for children with a theoretical framework, and this in turn sparked more interest among scholars. Thus, the "serious study of children's literature may be said to have begun with Freud" (Kidd 2011: 37). Psychoanalysis is, after all, "not merely a method, but a rich intellectual and narrative tradition" (Kidd 2004: 110). Although interesting, the focus of this thesis is not on fairy tales, but it is unavoidable to mention as it is the genre thought to be the first aimed mostly toward children, and because of the shared history with psychoanalysis. For now, I want to underline how old the connection between psychoanalysis, fairy tales, and children/childhood is.

This connection is well-known and heavily utilized as an analytical tool within children's literary theory, and by building upon such a substantial tradition, this thesis intends to offer more angles to wield this tool. However, it cannot be ignored that Freud and Freudian theories have accumulated a lot of criticism across disciplines, and to this day the validity and efficacy of Freudian methods are heavily debated. The scope of this thesis leaves no room to enter this debate in depth, neither am I a psychologist nor psychoanalyst, but because of the themes explored in my thesis, a psychoanalytic interpretive method became a productive choice as psychoanalysis and children's literature "revolve around similar concerns and themes" (Kidd 2004: 110). I do not subscribe to Freud's heavy emphasis on sexuality, and I believe, like Jung (1961: 215), that there are more important factors to be investigated first. Although many interesting findings could certainly be discovered with a focus on sexuality and sexual desires in mind, this thesis does not present any such findings. Lacan is also a central figure within the psychoanalytic tradition whom I could have drawn much knowledge from, but I simply did not have enough time to acquaint myself with the Lacanian canon.

Based on the main themes of this thesis being concepts such as grief, guilt, anxiety, dreams/nightmares, trauma, and monsters, I consider a psychoanalytic approach to be a logical route. I think it would be challenging to speak on the themes of this thesis without mentioning any Freudian theory, and as several academics within the field of monster theory point out, in approaching monsters and the horror genre a "psychoanalytical approach is unavoidable" (Gilmore 2003: 16), and "Psychoanalysis may […] still be unavoidable in discussing the genre" (Carroll 1990: 168). These authors will receive formal introductions in chapter three. As a concluding thought to this section, it is important to recognize the inherent Eurocentricity of psychoanalysis as a whole, and how psychoanalytic interpretive methods are

in no way universal. I am writing from a Western perspective with a Western upbringing and theories from Western scholars, which consequently affects everything in this thesis.

When psychoanalysis first started to be used as a tool for literary analysis, the focus was aimed more at the author and the author's intention with the text rather than on the text itself. With the emergence of postmodernism and the concept of the author being dead, the focus became more aimed toward the texts themselves. Although the author can say a lot about their books, I am of the belief that once a book is published, it is out of the author's hands. Neither do I subscribe to the procedure of psychoanalyzing an author based on their fictional work simply because, at least as far as the readers know, it is just that, fictional. The presence of the author will undeniably be apparent through their work because it is their work, but I personally do not believe that everything in their fictional works can be traced back to the author's personality and background unless the author themself is there to corroborate the claims as the chief authority of their own person and life. Thus, my thesis does not revolve around the authors of the chosen books, but on their fictional works.

The psychoanalytic interpretive methods utilized in this thesis are directed at the main characters, but this is not an attempt to diagnose any of the characters with anything, as they are just that, characters. This does not mean that a fictional character is in any way real, but they are a representation of reality, and my reasoning behind a psychoanalytical approach is the connection between real children and fictional children. By exploring themes presented in the books, such as grief, trauma, death, guilt, and anxiety, with theories from renowned scholars, the goal is to show how the fictional presentation of these very real things can be translated and understood in our day-to-day lives where these themes are ever-occurring. This is especially important since the thesis revolves around children's literature in particular, because these themes are exactly the kind of themes and experiences most adults would want to protect children from, and that is why it is even more imperative to present the theories behind these concepts in an attempt to better understand both children's literature and the children themselves.

I also want to challenge the assumption that literature must fulfill some greater purpose in order to be appreciated, *dulcis et utile*. This is especially true when it comes to children's literature where the main incentive from the very start was for the texts aimed at children to be didactic and moralizing, and this heritage of lessons still plays a big role within children's literature (maybe add some sources on this). Although, as mentioned earlier, many children's

books continue to include some form of lesson or moral for children to learn from, there has developed a greater acceptance of children's books that stray from this indoctrinated concept and for children's books to be appreciated just as any other book, regardless of genre or age category. If a book is appreciated by one person, does that not then make that book appreciated?

There is also the idea of a book being a work of art and to simply appreciate its beauty for what it is, or just for entertainment purposes. My approach to these books is a mixture of both. I want to showcase the complexity and layers of the novels themselves as further evidence to be added into the ongoing conversation about the claimed simplicity of children's books, and also highlight how the themes of the books can be used as an educational and/or conversational tool. In my view, neither of the books are strictly didactic, but nevertheless, some form of a moral lesson is present, especially at the end of the books, which is typical for children's literature. But again, if one looks hard enough, a moral lesson can be found in any book. The point here is to sideline children's books with adult books, not to say that they are similar in content, but that they are all complex enough to be deemed worthy of academic research and literary analysis. I hope my thesis can add to the growing exhibition of how complex, multilayered, character-driven, emotional, and profound children's literature can be.

A Monster Calls and *The Nest*: Who, What, Where, When, and Why

A Monster Calls was published in 2011 and it has a special backstory. It was first started by Siobhan Dowd, but she died from cancer before she could finish it, and author Patrick Ness was tasked to set her idea to life. As books often do, this one also reflects aspects of the authors' real life. Here we meet thirteen-year-old Conor O'Malley who tries his best to cope with the reality of his mother's terminal cancer. Conor's parents and grandmother are mostly absent, he is not receiving the support a child would need in such an awful situation. With the main character being thirteen mixed with the many bleak subject matters it presents, the book has proven difficult to place within an age category and genre. Although the age of the main character does not necessarily decide the age category, we can already see this as an example of complex literature in the way it refuses to be easily categorized. However, for the sake of the thesis, I have decided to agree with the placement of this book within children's literature/Middle Grade literature instead of the subcategory of Young Adult literature (although all are subcategories under the big umbrella of children's literature). The genre is low-fantasy where reality meshes with components of fantasy and horror such as monsters, dreamscapes, trauma, and magic. The novel has received many awards and has been critically

acclaimed by regular readers as well as being made into a major motion picture. I chose this novel because of its complexity and because it shows how a monster can be helpful to a child by encouraging and initiating a process to heal from childhood grief and self-reproach.

The Nest by Kenneth Oppel was published in 2015 and features similar elements as *A Monster Calls*. This book takes place over an intense summer where eleven-year-old protagonist Steven struggles to understand what is wrong with his baby brother who is in and out of the hospital. His parents are reluctant and vague with their answers and information. Steven is shown to be quite a fearful and anxious child from the very start, and the lack of communication and information by his parents causes his anxiety to worsen. This novel is not easy to define either, but it is similar to *A Monster Calls* with how it takes place in the real world but combined with elements of fantasy and horror. Also here we meet a child character who is not receiving the amount of support he needs in this time of stress and uncertainty, and throughout the book we see how a monster helps him in several ways to cope but also to accept the situation.

As a sidenote, both novels are originally illustrated, and although the illustrations provide additional nuance to the stories, I will not be including those in my analysis as they are not relevant to my thesis statement and the literary critical tools I utilize this time around. Moreover, I have not found much theory on either of these books, and especially not *The Nest*.

The literary analysis in this thesis is based on my reading and interactions with the books, and a child reader could (and most likely would) read it in a completely different manner. I am an adult, as this will influence my reading of the novels, and, in the spirit of what Terry Nodelman writes in *The Hidden Adult*, "I can't pretend to read like a child" (2008: 85). In other words, I do not know how a child would read and interpret these novels, but that is not the objective of this thesis, either. My goal is not to ruminate on what a child reader would think of the books or if they would even want to read the books I am analyzing. Instead, I want to showcase the themes of the books in an attempt to illuminate how important they can be. It has been shown through observational studies by scholars such as Arthur N. Applebee that children can and do "equate representations in the story with events in everyday life" (Meek 1987: 106). As a teacher and a librarian myself, I have also had the opportunity to witness this process firsthand where children recognize themselves in books, whether it be by

identifying with the characters, the themes, and/or the plot. This is not to claim that all children experience this or that it must be experienced in order to enjoy a book, but for the children who do experience this the book often takes a special place in their memory. It is this profound experience I want to highlight.

The novels exemplify how the bad things in the world do not disappear, but with more tools you can cope with such things in a better and healthier way. Books can be such tools.

Chapter Structure and Arguments

This thesis provides a deepdive into themes that some adults consider as inappropriate for children in an attempt to showcase how such themes can be helpful instead of harmful. The aim of this thesis is therefore to be an example of how books can be helpful to children, more specifically how monsters can be beneficial. This is not to say that all children must read books containing monsters, but more so a wish for more openness and acceptance of what children want to read, and an understanding how and why it might be a positive experience to read books featuring challenging themes and/or frightening elements.

Chapter one will function as a baseline in the sense that it focuses on the main characters' daily lives and symptoms of grief and potential trauma in the form of anticipatory childhood grief and emotional child neglect. This will give a backdrop for the remaining chapters to build upon. Dreams, which are the topic of chapter two, are often affected by what happens in our daily lives, and therefore it is necessary to analyze the child protagonists' daily circumstances to better show why and how their dreams come into existence. With the help of grief theory, trauma theory, and children's literature theory, this chapter will show how the aforementioned themes are presented in the books.

Chapter two builds on chapter one with a more extensive look at the theme of dreams that play an important role in both books. By taking a closer look at the protagonists' recurring dreams, I will show how they relate to the happenings in their daily lives. I argue that it is the repressed wishes caused by their bleak reality that produce these dreams in an attempt to fulfill said wishes (wish-fulfillment theory). This will be analyzed through the lens of dream theory, with both traditional dream theory such as theories developed by Freud and Jung, as well as more modern dream theory by researchers such as Hartmann, Kramer, Cohen, etc. The major themes of this chapter are the protagonists' recurrent dreams as a potential trauma symptom, wish-fulfillment, the Central Image of dreams, big dreams, and the idea of dreams being a form of therapy done by the brain, all concepts that will be explained in the chapter.

Chapter three takes on the task of investigating the monsters and their functions in the books. This chapter argues that the monsters help the protagonists more than their caregivers do, in the sense that the monsters are the ones to urge (and force) the children to face reality and thus face their fears, and in turn release the guilt they are carrying caused by their unfulfilled wishes. The monsters function as a symbol of the protagonists' fears. This chapter demonstrates how the monsters act as a sort of therapist, and it questions the notion of a monster on the basis of monster theory, developmental theory, philosophy, anthropology, and psychoanalytical concepts such as the primitive mind, the collective unconscious, and the act of communicating with oneself.

Chapter 1: Portrayals of Childhood Grief and Trauma in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest*

Introduction

It is made apparent through several recent studies on children's grief processes that children grieve in more complex ways than adults give them credit for, and that an inability or refusal to acknowledge this complexity can cause children to develop symptoms of maladaptive grief and/or posttraumatic stress symptoms (Alvis et al. 2022; Revet et al. 2020; Venkatesan 2022). Despite the popularization of stage grief models such as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' five stages where grief is presented as something that follows predictable steps, the intricacy and individuality of grief should not be forgotten, nor should it be downplayed as something easily overcome if one follows a set of predisposed stages where individual needs are subdued. This is ever the more important in relation to children's grief processes because, as research shows, children's needs and feelings are often forgotten or simply not taken into consideration because children's potentiality for experiencing grief is ignored by many adults who find death to be a taboo theme for children and thus something to be avoided, or because, until recently, childhood grief was thought to not exist based on the idea that children were protected by "the immaturity of their cognitive and psychic development" and therefore unable to suffer from grief (Revet et al. 2020: 2). This view is now outdated and disproved, and this chapter aims to expand the understanding and knowledge of childhood grief and trauma in relation to children's literature.

Based on updated theories surrounding the recognized existence of childhood grief and theories that illuminate how multilayered grief can be, this chapter will show the reality of childhood grief and the potential outcome if not followed up by caregivers, which can end up in trauma. In support of utilizing books as a tool to help children work through their own grief process and as a part of children's emotional education, I will analyze sections of *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* where the characters' grief and trauma symptoms coincide with the theories on childhood grief and trauma. This is not to say that the characters are in any way a complete portrayal of a real child or of childhood grief/trauma, but I will show how and where the books do reflect reality and thus can function as a gateway into talking about subjects related to grief, death, illness, trauma, and so on, for adults and children both, because, as shown in the following theory section, open communication is the number one advice in times of duress.

Moreover, this chapter argues that *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* provide realistic portrayals of what most research on childhood grief and trauma presents, namely the lackluster support and acknowledgement from children's caregivers of the children's grief, and how this can end up being a traumatic experience for the child if their grief symptoms are ignored and/or devalued. By presenting more information on anticipatory grief, which is a form of grief that in itself is often forgotten or diminished. By showcasing books that portray this form of grief, it adds another layer to the conversation because it shines a light on a group of our population that is often forgotten in conversations surrounding grief, and on a form of grief that often goes unrecognized. Comparatively, the trauma discussed in this chapter, emotional child neglect, is often referred to as the 'neglect of neglect', implying how this is a form of trauma that is frequently overlooked. By including these forms of grief and trauma in the novels, the literary examples can help us expand and deepen our knowledge of grief and trauma in an attempt to better recognize and communicate about them.

Grief, and an emphasis on childhood grief and anticipatory grief

Grief, alongside dreams and monsters, is an ancient concept that is neither easily defined nor categorized. Grief is universal yet deeply personal and subjective: it is something we all will face, but how we face it and continue to grapple with it cannot be broken down into a neat step-by-step manual or simply be solved by letting go of the lost object. Although stage models such as Kübler-Ross' five stages of grief is well-known and widely utilized, especially in popular culture, these kinds of theories that put grief into predictable phases have been empirically rejected for being too rigid and uniform (Hall 2014: 8). Likewise, the idea that letting go of your loved one in order to "successfully" grieve, a take that was especially supported by Freud and modernism in general, has been widely challenged (Hall 7). The ability to maintain bonds with the deceased is now seen as something positive and a potential resource, as long as it is adaptive and not maladaptive (accepting the loss versus not accepting the loss) (Hall 10). Research has shown that the act of continuing bonds with the deceased is common in both children and adults, and this is associated with less grief over time (Dyregrov 2008: 32). This suggests that the notion of "letting go" might not be as beneficial as it once was presented, but the clue is to uphold a balance between accepting the death while still maintaining a relationship with the deceased so it does not grow into something unhealthy and dysfunctional.

Despite being potentially beneficial to some—in the sense of placing grief into something that can be overcome if one follows a certain progression—no grief model can ever encapsulate the subjective, cultural, or societal aspects that will affect someone's individual grief process. In Western culture, the socio-cultural norms will often cause adults to want to protect children from grief, based on the belief that grief is too unpleasant and painful for a young person to encounter. This sort of mindset can be related to most attitudes toward the treatment of children in other areas (such as in children's literature, for example): children should be protected so they can maintain their perceived innocence. It was long believed that children could not experience grief because they were too immature and underdeveloped, but this idea has been challenged in modern grief theory (Revet et al. 2020: 2). However, according to a study done on developmental manifestations of grief in children, many studies of childhood grief "suffer from methodological limitations", such as a lack of developmentally appropriate language and the use of adult grief measures, a lack of sample diversity, and a shortage of longitude studies focused on grief reactions over time (Alvis et al 2022: 6).

Furthermore, there is a lack of consensus in the field when it comes to how to accurately measure childhood grief, if this even can be measured. It is also worth mentioning that in general, studies on children are not as widely done as studies on adults. There are many reasons as to why this is the case, and the most prevalent ones are the ethical considerations since children are a vulnerable group that rely on adults to maintain their rights, and how the children's maturity might not be developed enough to understand the aim or the questions of the study. As many things regarding children, scientific studies of children also have a tendency to treat children as a generalized population, disregarding both their diversity and individuality.

Similar to adults, children do not react in one specific way when confronted with loss. In fact, "the similarity between grief reactions in children and adults is striking" (Dyregrov 2008: 75). Children can portray a wide range of grief responses, influenced by the same factors as adults, which mainly are the relationship with the lost loved one, their environment, personality, family, cultural milieu, and type of death. The main difference between adult reactions and children's reactions is the level of maturation. We need to appreciate the fact that children's reactions are similar to those of adults', but the developmental aspect must nevertheless be considered (Pynoos 1992: 3). The problem that often arises in the interaction between adults and children within the sphere of grieving is the underestimation of children's ability to grieve and thus the child's reactions and symptoms might be overlooked (Pynoos 5). Several studies have found that "children who have been educated about death are more likely to respond in

an adaptive manner than children for whom death has remained a mystery and a taboo subject" (Pynoos 9), which is a clear incentive for adapting an open and honest communication style about death with children. Literary works that present portrayals of grief and death can be a good way to start such a conversation.

Dr. Atle Dyregrov raises a similar observation in his book, *Grief in Children: A Handbook for Adults*, after working directly with families and children who have experienced bereavement and/or trauma. Through his work, he has seen an impulse from adults to shield children from bad news, and this tendency can act as a hindrance when trying to help the child and family (Dyregrov 2008: 9). He stresses the necessity of a healthy and supportive adult environment to help children gain insight and understanding. If the adult recovery environment can provide this, children have a great capacity to tackle difficult situations (Dyregrov 2008: 14). The main point Dyregrov continues to emphasize throughout his book is the importance of communication. Parents, guardians, and caregivers need to talk openly with their children; "Silence and suppression is almost always a source of anxiety for children" (Dyregrov 2008:69). If loss during childhood is ignored, repressed, or in any way not worked through, it can result in developmental issues and psychological problems, both concurrently and later in life. But how do we know if a child is grieving? Seeing that children might not be able to verbally convey their emotions as comfortably or eloquently as adults, Dyregrov provides a list of potential grief reactions to pay attention to in children, which include regressive behavior, social isolation, fantasies, personality changes, pessimism about the future, and so on (Dyregrov 2008: 40). These symptoms of grief can be difficult to pinpoint or talk about in a productive manner, so with the inclusion of representations of such symptoms in children's books can be an effective way to enter such conversations or to simply have literary examples to refer to, which can be especially beneficial to children who tend to better understand information presented in concrete rather than abstract terms. Dr. Dyregrov's grief reactions will be linked with portrayals of them in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* in the analysis later in this chapter, as all of the grief reactions make one or several appearances.

In most definitions, grief is termed as something that happens *after* a significant loss, but this is not the case for everyone, and not for the child protagonists, either. Therefore, it is necessary to show what else might hide under the dark cloud of grief. There are many types of grief, and the type of grief most relevant in relation to the books analyzed later in this chapter, is the notion of 'anticipatory grief'. Here, the grief occurs *before* the loss has taken place and

one knows that death is inevitable. According to Dr. Dyregrov, children frequently experience a form of anticipatory grief (2008: 107), which underscores the need for more knowledge around this form of grieving.

This view is further supported by a recent study done in 2022 on the developmental manifestations of grief in children and adolescents by Lauren Alvis et al., where it is stated that the death of a caregiver, sibling, or loved one is one of the most commonly reported and most distressing forms of trauma among youth (Alvis et al. 1). The loss of someone close is devastating in itself, but if the death is one of anticipation it may be particularly distressing for children. Anticipated deaths can cause the child to experience additional potentially traumatic events such as recurring hospital visits, disturbing medical procedures, the dying person's deterioration, loss of security/safety, etc. (Alvis et al. 5). This is the case for the child protagonists in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest*, which again points to the books acting as realistic portrayals of updated findings within the field of childhood grief.

In a different study, "Adjustment of Children Facing the Death of a Parent Due to Cancer" by Karolynn Siegel et al., compared predeath and postdeath levels of depression and anxiety in children who lost a parent to cancer with the levels of children who did not experience such a loss, and the data suggests that children are more distressed in the terminal phase of a parent's illness than during the period following the actual loss (Siegel et al. 1996: 448). In other words, the children's depression and anxiety are higher *before* the death than after. This relates to the psychodynamic concept of anticipatory grief, a process where the knowledge of a future significant loss can prompt the individual to "begin the grieving process in anticipation of that event" (Siegel & Weinstein 1983: 61). The term was coined by psychiatrist Erich Lindemann in 1944, but it is backed by little empirical study despite the attention it has received in professional literature on dying, grief, and mourning. The misconception here is that some people think anticipatory grief means grieving in advance and thereby being done with the grief process before the death has occurred, but this is not necessarily what is meant by the term. Instead, the idea anticipatory grief functioning as its own form of grieving that is stimulated by the losses that have already occurred or are occurring, such as the loss of one's previous lifestyle, relationship, family dynamics, the person they used to be (both the terminally ill person and the people close to them), safety, certainty, goals, and so on. Another form of grieving that is often relevant when it comes to childhood grief is 'disenfranchised grief' or 'hidden grief', where grief is seen to collide with society's grieving rules and norms, resulting in a reluctance to talk about such grief or for the person to suppress their grief. Hidden grief can easily be recognized as something the child

protagonists experience levels of, because as representations of children they too are excluded from a lot of the information and updates in an attempt to shield them from uncomfortable news.

The consensus of the theory I have presented reveal that grief is extremely multifaceted and that childhood grief should be respected as such. With an understanding that "losing a loved one is among the most common and stressful traumatic events" a child can experience (Revet et al. 2022: 1), and thus grief can become a traumatic experience, especially if it is not handled properly. The next section will offer an updated view on childhood trauma to show what can happen if childhood grief is ignored. With the notion of death being potentially more traumatic for children than for adults because of the child's "less developed cognitive capacity to make sense" of the illness and death, it proves necessary to present trauma symptoms in children (Alvis et al. 2022: 5). In *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest*, the child protagonists' grief symptoms are often overlooked by their caregivers and portrayals of trauma symptoms appear. To show how these representations depict real trauma theories, I will now present the theories and trauma symptoms.

Grief and neglect as trauma

Much like childhood grief, it has been assumed up until recently that children are affected by traumatic events only to a limited extend (Dyregrov 2010: 9). Sadly, this attitude remains prevalent, and many adults refrain from speaking about traumatic incidents with children (Dyregrov 2010: 9). Although children should have some agency over what they want to talk about and how much they want to talk about it, the reluctance from adults is a disservice when realizing how many children experience trauma. By looking at official U.S. government websites such as The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) and Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), childhood trauma proves more common than what one might initially think. According to SAMHSA's numbers from 2021, more than two thirds of children reported at least one traumatic event by age 16, and at least one in seven children have experienced child abuse and/or neglect in the past year.

Child abuse and neglect are often interconnected, but this chapter will focus on neglect, and more specifically emotional neglect. Despite neglect being a more prevalent issue than abuse, a widespread recognition of neglect as maltreatment has lingered far behind (Erickson & Egeland 2002: 4). The definition of trauma in APA's Dictionary of Psychology states that events that "challenge an individual's view of the world as a just, safe, and

predictable place" can be traumatic, but the neglect of children tend to be overshadowed by more visible and violent trauma, such as abuse. Emotional neglect in particular is challenging to substantiate or document because of an absence of clear physical evidence and because emotional neglect usually happens within the privacy of the home (Erickson & Egeland 2002: 6). It is often stated that the treatment of child neglect is "the neglect of neglect" because of the paradox of neglect having a higher incidence rate than abuse, yet neglect is the least studied and understood type of maltreatment (McSherry 2007: 607). There are several explanations suggested for this tragedy, and most of them revolve around politics, economics, and the lack of proper definitions of the term. According to McSherry, the social policy in the United States "continually under-states the consequences of neglect", and "social workers often underestimate the seriousness of neglect, in spite of the large body of evidence that suggests that neglect may lead to major developmental deficits" (611). There are many intricate reasons behind the neglect of neglect, such as a difficulty to properly define the term which again affects how neglect is viewed and handled, but for this chapter I want to acknowledge the bleak reality of child neglect and more specifically child emotional neglect. As the numbers suggests, many children suffer from this type of neglect, and in tandem with childhood grief it is easy to imagine how it can be traumatic when a child does not receive proper emotional support or attention while struggling with feelings of anxiety, unsafety, loneliness, etc.

SAMHSA underlines that children can and do recover from trauma, with extra emphasis on the child's support system: "A critical part of children's recovery is having a supportive caregiving system, access to effective treatments, and service systems that are trauma informed". Again, as with grief, support and communication with the child during and after a traumatic event is imperative, and the lack of this will affect the healing process. The point here is to show different kinds of trauma and that a significant number of children experience some form of traumatic event. To better recognize potential trauma, it is beneficial to have a set of symptoms to refer to. Many symptoms are listed on NCTSN's website, and most of them can be found in the novels I analyze, with particular focus on symptoms such as anxiety, depressive symptoms, difficulties with self-regulation, behavioral changes, and nightmares. The latter will be explored more in depth in the next chapter, while the rest are part of the upcoming literary analysis.

By focusing on trauma that is less recognized and thus not always acknowledged as being potentially traumatic, *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* provide literary examples of how

grief and emotional neglect can impact children who lack the support system needed, which causes them to lose trust in their caregivers while desperately needing and wanting someone to talk to. This is one of many reasons why books like these are so important, and maybe especially so with their portrayal of situations that maybe not everyone is aware can be defined as potentially traumatic.

Trauma in children's literature is a recurrent theme up for discussion in the field, despite the contrasting opinions of parents and scholars on what role trauma should or should not have in literature aimed at children. In *Melancholia and Maturation: The Use of Trauma in American Children's Literature*, Professor Eric L. Tribunella suggests that the experience of melancholia is necessary for children to mature and that this is reflected in youth narratives in twentieth century American literature. In a more controversial claim, Tribunella writes that children's literature and American culture "relies on the contrived traumatization of children—both protagonists and readers—as a way of representing and promoting the process of becoming a mature adult" (2010: xi). The idea that views challenges as something to learn from and help one toughen up is prevalent in Western society, so the abundance of trauma within children's literature is perhaps not so surprising after all. Often referred to as partaking in "the exposure model", this kind of literature wants children to be exposed to trauma presented in safe and controllable avenues such as books, movies, graphic novels, and so on, in an attempt to prepare children for a reality where traumatic events are copious, as the statistics above revealed.

According to Professor Kenneth B. Kidd and his book *Freud in Oz: At the Intersections of Psychoanalysis and Children's Literature*, the consensus these days is that children's literature "is the *most* rather than the least appropriate forum for trauma work" (2011: 120; my emphasis). This view proves challenging to the many adults whose main incentive is to protect children's innocence, but that does not take away from the fact that so many children's books frequently include depictions of trauma in the form of death, war, violence, neglect, bullying, etc. As interesting as this discussion is, and as touched upon in the introduction of the thesis, there is no agreement within the field of children's literature whether children's books should prepare children for real life or if they should do their best to protect children's perceived innocence. Because of the scope and goal of this thesis I will not enter this debate. My incentive is to show that there exist different kinds of trauma, that depictions of trauma frequently appear in children's literature, and that experienced trauma

can be overcome with the right support system in comparison to how the lack of support can have a negative effect.

In most definitions of trauma, the event of a sudden, unexpected death is listed as a potentially traumatic experience, but anticipated death is not listed. This perhaps stems from the idea that if a death is anticipated, there is more time to better prepare the child for the loss, thus lessening the potentiality of trauma. But what happens when this preparation is non-existent? What happens when the caregivers fail to inform the child of the progression of death or to give them enough emotional support and attention? According to studies done on bereaved youth, the findings suggest that anticipated or illness-related losses may be particularly distressing for children (Alvis et al. 2022: 5). A study done in 2014 revealed that children who lost a caregiver to a prolonged illness showed higher levels of maladaptive grief and post-traumatic stress symptoms in comparison to children who lost a caregiver in natural death (Alvis et al. 5). The reasons for these are manifold, but some may include the reality of witnessing the deterioration of the caregiver, visits to hospital (which many children already associate with disease, pain, death), witnessing medical procedures which can leave their caregiver in increased pain, and the changes of mood the caregiver can display as an effect of the medicines they are taking or simply having a good or bad day. All of this, combined with a lack of information and emotional support, will leave the child uncertain and scared. The child needs the adults in their environment to help them navigate the death of a loved one, whether it is a death that is yet to happen or after the death, and there is significant research that show how "caregivers play a critical role in the development of their child's emotion regulation skills" (Alvis et al. 6-7). This is of course a lot of responsibility, but a part of providing the child with a supportive emotional system can also look like getting professional help if one struggles to do it alone, and a form of cooperation between the therapist and caregiver could definitely be effective.

As with grief, however, trauma is also widely defined as occurring *after* an event, as a *result*, not as a process. As with grief, the child protagonists in these novels are currently experiencing the potentially traumatic event as an ongoing thing, not a finalized one. Not as an *after*. I have not been able to find any theory on this, only on trauma as an aftereffect and not as something one might experience *during* the traumatic event. Traumas such as emotional neglect and grief are often an ongoing ordeal that do not necessarily have a specific beginning or end, as healing processes are not linear. The analysis will provide examples of

how such experiences are portrayed in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest*, and how they do or do not portray a realistic picture in relation to the presented theory.

Analysis

In *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest*, both child protagonists are faced with terrible amounts of uncertainty. As far as the books reveal, this is also their first confrontation with death, and more specifically death caused by prolonged chronic illness. The death itself has not occurred at the start of the books, but the looming threat of it is unyielding and lingers as its own character like a storm cloud on the horizon. On top of this, and *because* of this, the child protagonists are often left to their own devices, navigating this new world of fear and guilt and insecurity mostly alone without anyone to answer their many questions. I will show how the protagonists develop symptoms of grief and trauma in their daily lives throughout the books, as well as how their emotional support systems are subpar, resulting in even more uncertainty and anxiety. By analyzing the lack of a support system and showcasing the protagonists' symptoms and how these symptoms can be understood as symptoms of grief, it will become more apparent why and how the monsters show up to help the protagonists work through their anxieties, as I argue that the monsters prove more helpful to the protagonists' healing processes than their caregivers do.

A Monster Calls

Conor is thirteen years old, and according to developmental grief theory, he should be able to understand that death is irreversible and natural (Wass 1985; Sood et al. 2006). He is experiencing several traumatic life events from the outset and throughout: he is bullied at school, excluded from his peers, has an absent father, and his mother battles terminal cancer. Already at the start of the book, it is apparent that Conor has taken on an adult role as he makes his own breakfast, packs his bag for school, washes clothes, and takes out the trash. This reflects the forced maturity that Dyregrov describes, and according to him, it is not an unusual development for children who have lost a parent to be 'forced' into an adult role where they take on responsibilities inappropriate for their age (2008: 53). Although Dyregrov writes this about children who already have lost a parent, it can also pertain to children who are experiencing the prolonged illness of a parent, losing them little by little. Nevertheless, Conor has already lost a parent in the sense that his father has moved countries after the divorce and is not around to help with anything.

Conor has three main adults in his life, but none of them do a great job supporting him in the form of emotional support or communication and information. Conor's mother is chronically ill with cancer. Conor's father has been distant ever since he moved to America six years ago, where he lives with his new wife and their baby. Conor's maternal grandmother is not like a typical loving grandmother: she is elegant, rigid, and impatient, especially with Conor. By portraying parental failures of communication and support, *A Monster Calls* hones in on the child's experience and how someone who is reliant on others by nature struggles to navigate the heavy emotions of grief, loneliness, and guilt alone.

As is apparent in most grief theory—both in general but especially in regards to children—the need for information around the illness and death is crucial, but this need is often underestimated by adults (Dyregrov 2008: 150). Throughout the novel, none of the adults in Conor's life give him much information about his mother and her prognosis, and it is often Conor himself who actively asks the adults in an attempt to gain more information. In fact, the responsibility to talk about the situation is given to Conor on several occasions. The first instance is when his grandmother visits and takes him aside, telling him to "talk to her about this", 'her' referring to his mother (Ness 2011: 61). She corrects herself quickly, saying that she (his mother) needs to talk *to him*, but the effect is still that Conor was first given the responsibility for such a conversation, which would be an incredibly difficult conversation to have regardless of who initiates it. Similarly, when Conor talks to his mother later, he is the one doing the adult part of initiating the conversation and asking the tough questions while his mother tries to brush it off. Even though his mother keeps telling him everything is normal and that he should not worry, Conor simply tells her "you could tell me, you know", hinting toward a sense that maybe things are not as great as she claims and that Conor understands this (Ness 101). When his mother explains the new plans the doctors have for her, and she asks Conor if it makes sense to him, to which Conor shakes his head, she simply agrees and does not try to explain things further or in a different manner so that he might be able to understand (Ness 155). In an attempt to protect the child from sad news, the result is often a child who feels left out and who develops symptoms of depression and anxiety, as Conor does. Through these situations, Ness makes it clear how Conor is kept at bay despite him actively trying to gain more information about his mother and the reality of her prognosis, thereby providing his readers with an example of how *not* to handle childhood grief.

Conor is shown to portray many symptoms of grief and trauma, and some of the most apparent ones are his anger and guilt. Anger and acting out is a common reaction among

grieving children (Dyregrov 2008: 34). A recurrent happening is how Conor desperately wants to be punished, which stems from the guilt he is experiencing, and it often manifests in an act of anger. For example, when he destroys his grandmother's sitting room in a fit, his grandmother only ignores him, not giving him any reaction at all when he expects her to explode in anger. Later, when he beats up his bully, Harry, at school, the headmistress simply lets Conor off with a warning instead of expelling him like he desperately wants her to do. This obsession with punishment has led Conor into a complex bond with his bullies, and at one point he actually feels relief when the bullies walk toward him (Ness 147). This is because of the certainty of knowing that they will hurt him, and part of him thinks he deserves this pain. The bullies are the only ones who treat him normally, and even if that means violence and name-calling, Conor would rather have that than having to be constantly forgiven based on the situation he is going through with his mother and having people feel sorry for him. In fact, the thing that causes Conor to finally fight back against his bully, is when Harry figures out what will hurt Conor the most: ignoring him. Before this, Harry says "Conor O'Malley who wants to be punished" (Ness 178), which shows how much children actually register that adults do not (in contrast to the adults in Conor's life who never comments on this need for punishment, they only absolve him). Harry and the bullies give Conor some of the punishment he craves, while the adults in his life seems to think the situation he is going through is punishment enough, shown for example by his father commenting "what could possibly be the point?" when Conor asks him directly why he is not being punished for destroying his grandmother's room (Ness 148). For an adult, this might be seen as a sympathetic act to spare the child, but from the child's view, especially a child who craves normalcy, this constant mercy can be frustrating and might also translate into a form of carelessness, pretending something did not happen and shoving it away instead of facing the consequences.

By ignoring Conor's wrongdoings, the adults indirectly signal how it is more important and beneficial to ignore something than to face the consequences, and how it is easier to pretend that everything is okay. This can also be related to one's feelings and emotions, and there are several instances where Conor is shown to deny his own emotions and worries. An effective literary tool Ness utilizes to show this denial is through the usage of hyphens to cut any uncomfortable thought or conversation off short, for example when Conor hears his mother being sick in the room next door where it is shown that he understands this as her being ill "for far longer than she should have been-", a thought abrupted before Conor's consciousness

has a chance to reflect on what this prolonged illness means, and he has to push "the thoughts out of his head" (Ness 63). This coincides with the tendency to suppress difficult emotions, especially in Western society, which is a common occurrence for adults and children both.

According to Dyregrov, actively suppressing emotions can have a negative effect on our health and social life (2008: 123), but because complex emotions such as anger, grief, guilt, etc. are too strong for most children to properly digest, any thoughts that trigger such emotions "can be pushed out of conscious awareness for longer periods of time" (2008: 48). Related to this is the choice of having the protagonist be a boy. Conor is a boy at the cusp between childhood and adolescence where the opinions of one's peers tend to become more important than that of adults. Although perhaps a cultural lie and narrative, Dyregrov has noticed that especially boys have a hard time talking about feelings (2008: 35; 61; 82). This tendency is reflected in *A Monster Calls* through the hyphens mentioned before, and through Conor's consistent denial of his mother's declining health. An example of this is when his teacher, Miss Kwan, asks Conor how he is, and although this triggers the guilt in Conor in the form of flashing his recurring nightmare in him, he does not think he deserves any compassion, and he tells her that he is "not going through anything" (Ness 2011: 95). At the end of the book, Conor admits that he has suppressed these feelings ever since his mother first became sick, and even after having 'the talk' with his mother where he learns that the medicine is not working, he still tries to ignore the truth. Because of this resistance to talk about feelings, it is even more important to pay attention to potential symptoms that are not verbally expressed, and by showing such symptoms through the novel, *A Monster Calls* provides the readers with information and examples that are reflected by real life, as grief and trauma theory has shown.

Another symptom of grief and potential trauma that is heavily featured throughout *A Monster Calls* is Conor's recurrent dreams and nightmares. These dreams serve as a subplot and they will be analyzed more in depth in chapter two, while in this chapter the dreams will be used as an example of a symptom that is often downplayed with the notion of it 'just being a dream', thus not something that needs to be taken seriously. This presumption is shown in the novel through Conor's father when Conor tells him about the dream he has been having. Although he blurts it out to steer the conversation away from the fact that his father offers Conor to visit them (his new family in America), opposed to Conor's wish to have an offer to move there. Conor then tells his father about "a tree that's been visiting", which is what happens in this recurrent dream. Instead of asking more about this statement, which would be an unusual

statement coming from most children, Conor's father tells him to stop (Ness 114). The hyphen-effect happens here as well by cutting sentences short as a way not to delve deeper into uncomfortable waters. This is an example of how adults, and "especially fathers", often "underestimate how children experience the situation" (Dyregrov 2008: 50). Further, Dyregrov explains that parents often "underestimate the consequences critical events have for children" and how much time children actually spend thinking of the event (2008: 115). This is perhaps a reason why Ness has chosen to focus on the recurrent dream as a symptom of Conor's worries and grief, to reflect the reality many children face when being in the midst of a family tragedy.

Other 'hidden' symptoms, i.e., covert symptoms that are harder to pinpoint, such as isolation, loneliness, dissociation, denial, depression, guilt, shame, etc., are also portrayed in the novel, but it is the symptom of recurrent dreams that plays the larger role, and that is why I will present the dreams and nightmares in more detail in the next chapter. The aim here is to make it understood that recurrent dreams can be a symptom of grief and trauma and thus should be taken as seriously as any other symptom. *A Monster Calls* provides a fictional illustration of a very real situation where a lot of the incidents presented correlate with recent grief and trauma theory, as I have shown, and this book can therefore be utilized as a tool to educate oneself on how to treat children in grief in a more helpful manner, or it can be helpful as a channel in itself for children who can relate to someone in a similar position as they might find themselves, as well as functioning as an addition for emotional education.

The Nest

Steven is eleven years old and he is a worrier. He is scared of a lot of things; he is scared of the dark, he suffers from panic attacks, he has a vivid imagination and a lot of strange dreams, and he often feels low. These traits have been with him since before the starting point of this book, but after the arrival of his baby brother, Steven's sensitive and worrying nature only worsens throughout the book. This is because his brother is born with a mysterious disease which is never fully named, but it is evident from the start that the disease is life-threatening and congenital. Steven's family situation is differs from Conor's, as his parents are still married, and they all live together in the same house together with his little sister, Nicole, and now the baby whom Steven does not refer to by name until the very end of the book, which is a literary effect I will explore later in this analysis. Similar to *A Monster Calls*, however, is the appearance of several grief and trauma symptoms, where the main one is Steven's recurrent

dreams, as well as the lack of an emotional support system at home. With the book taking place during a summer vacation, Steven's few friends are away on vacation, and he does not have any extra potential support or attention from adults at his school. This causes Steven to feel alone much of the time, and he spends a lot of time in his head. According to Dyregrov, "children's fantasies and causal thinking may have a negative influence on their grief" and it is "not uncommon for children to have two versions of what has happened"; one is the reality based on received information, while the other version is inspired by their own fantasy and imagination (2008: 80). *The Nest* is a good example that showcases exactly this process where Steven's fantasies become more and more real to him as time goes by.

In a desperate attempt to gain more information about his baby brother's prognosis, Steven is shown to eavesdrop on his parents several times. The lack of information causes Steven's imagination to go into overdrive, as is reflected by the dreams he experiences. It also shows that children often pay attention to more than the adults think they do: "All our experience indicates that children know and understand more than they admit to adults" (Dyregrov 2008: 64). Rightfully, Steven's parents are better at talking with him and answering his questions than Conor's caregivers, but they still spend a lot of time at the hospital and at work, and they leave Steven and Nicole either with babysitter Vanessa or with Steven as the babysitter. Here we see another example of the reality of children taking on adult responsibilities in the absence of their caregivers, as was also shown in *A Monster Calls*. A direct example of Steven stepping into an adult role is when he is home alone and decides to take down a wasps' nest that has formed outside the baby's bedroom window. By this point the reader knows that Steven is both afraid of and allergic to wasps, which his parents also are aware of. Yet, they have not removed the nest, even though Steven was stung earlier in the book and had to go to the hospital. Steven's frustration shines through as he approaches the nest as he thinks that his parents "were too busy" with the baby, so he must do this himself (Oppel 2015: 90). After his mission goes awry and he fails to remove the nest, his parents are upset with him for trying to remove it, telling him "we're a little busy around here, buddy", to which Steven replies that he is allergic and "no one seems to care about that!" (Oppel 96). He mentions the baby and the fact that the baby can also be stung by the wasps, and this can be seen as an indirect reflection of how Steven views himself as less important than the baby because of his parents' attention always being on the baby, and also to get a reaction from his parents to counter his belief.

In Steven's case, the illness his brother is suffering from is vaguer than Conor's mother's illness, which adds more uncertainty to the situation and outcome. A direct diagnosis is never disclosed, but Steven's parents tell him how the sickness might never get better and that the baby "might not even live" (Oppel 2015: 4-5). For an overthinker like Steven, this kind of inconsistent and ambiguous information is far from helpful, especially not when this information is never elaborated upon. He notices how his parents try to do research on his brother's disease when they are alone, and he "wanted to know what they were reading and learning, but they didn't talk about it much" (Oppel 6). Again, as with the eavesdropping, this is an example of how much children manage to pick up on no matter how careful the parents are. Moreover, it shows Steven's wish to talk about things more openly, but as with Conor, this initiation should be made by the caregivers, not the child. In fact, even when visibly seeing that his parents are upset, Steven is "afraid to ask them what had happened" (Oppel 38). The choice of the word 'afraid' points to the bigger picture of a continuous lack of information and that Steven likely has faced a bad response when asking questions before.

Despite this, Steven blurts out questions every now and then, usually after they have marinated in his own imagination for a bit too long and he becomes desperate for an answer based on factual information, which only his parents and the doctors possess. For example, when he helps his father clean the dishes, he asks his father as directly as he can: "Is the baby going to die?" (Oppel 41). The clearness of this question demands a clear answer, but his father cannot give him that. His father does try to answer the question, but there is no definite answer. Part of this can be a reflection of how adults refrain from talking with children about other children dying, as this involves "admitting that the same can happen to their own children", but this "is exactly what the child might need to talk about" (Dyregrov 2008: 61) Death is not an easy topic to talk about for many, but it is this uneasiness that strengthens the need for open communication and information because "silence and suppression is almost always a source of anxiety in children" (Dyregrov 2008: 69). Anxiety grows stronger and stronger in Steven as time goes by and the weight of uncertainty presses down on him in the form of recurrent nightmares, obsessive thoughts, and how he often feels "low" and "low-functioning" (Oppel 2015: 42; 44).

The toll of constantly seeing his parents sad, frustrated, and exhausted without the ability or opportunity to talk to them about it causes Steven to feel a sense of responsibility to not worry them more. He does not want to concern them even though his own symptoms of grief and trauma worsen. This can be seen when he starts to experience recurring dreams and it takes

him three days to tell his parents because he does not want them to worry or to think that he "was a freak" (Oppel 2015: 25). Sadly, his parents' reaction causes Steven to wish that he never have told them; his father is visibly agitated and his mother cries while saying "It's too much" (Oppel 98), a strong implication that Steven's fear is proved correct in that he now has worried them more. His parents do apologize for not being around much, and they ask if he wants to see Dr. Brown again.

Here the readers learn that Steven often has intense dreams and that he has been sent to a therapist before. This is a great example of the ambiguous role therapy holds for many in Western society today; therapy is there to help but the notion of needing or wanting help is weak to admit and admitting means there is something wrong with you because you need help. A double-edged sword that is exemplified by Steven's reaction where he feels judged and that his parents think he is "crazy again" and that he is abnormal because "you don't get sent to a therapist if you're normal" (Oppel 100; 116). The choice to include a therapist character gives the reader more insight into what can happen when meeting with a therapist, something most children might not be familiar with, and it also serves as another layer of the lack of communication between Steven and his parents by adding a third-party. Instead of trying to talk to him more, they send him to a therapist again, the key word here being 'again'. Openness around therapy should be normalized and it is therefore great that the author included this in the novel, but Steven's reactions of crying and being scared of being crazy portray therapy more as a form of punishment rather than help. When Steven visits Dr. Brown, the lack of communication is further presented by the revelation of the imaginary friend Steven used to have as a way of talking to himself. This can also work as an example of how Steven employs fantastical thinking in order to cope. Dr. Brown asks if Steven misses his imaginary friend, and Steven thinks that he misses having "someone like him, only real, to talk to. The perfect listener, the person who could help me sort things out" (Oppel 106-107). In most cases, this description could be fitting for a therapist, but when Steven thinks this it shows the reader how he does not trust his therapist enough to fill this role. Neither do his parents, and from the knowledge of the imaginary friend he used to have, his parents have never quite filled that role. And now that life is difficult and there are multiple things to 'sort out', Steven longs for someone to talk to. Likewise, this ultimately shows us how lonely and isolated Steven feels, which can be a symptom of grief.

Another symptom of grief and trauma that continuously appears in *The Nest* is the guilt Steven carries. This is based on his unrealistic wish to help his parents and the baby, and it is

further developed when he starts having recurrent dreams. The magical thinking of childhood can easily be reactivated when faced with difficult situations, and thus "guilt feelings and self-reproach do not need an objective foundation to gain foothold" (Dyregrov 2008: 74). As Steven spends more time on his fantasies, his dreams and nightmares become more vivid, and his guilt and self-reproach grow deeper. Because of the things that happen in his dreams (which will be discussed in chapter two), Steven believes that he can save the baby, which puts a huge and impossible amount of responsibility on him. Yet, he wants to help his parents so things can return to normal, and he "couldn't bear it, knowing [he] might have stopped it" (Oppel 2015: 148). 'It' referring to the baby dying. This is a good example of how a child under duress can turn to fantastical thoughts when they are not given enough information to make sense of the situation, and Steven's inclination toward using fantasy as a coping mechanism has already been established with the inclusion of his former imaginary friend.

Steven is shown to feel guilty when he needs his parents' attention, such as when he is stung by a wasp or when he tells them about his dreams, as if these are things he can control. He feels guilty when he is around the baby, because he does not want to hold him in fear of somehow being contaminated, that "what was wrong with him would become wrong with [Steven]" (Oppel 113), and the only things he sees when he looks at the baby are "all the things that were supposed to be wrong with him" (Oppel 114). This links back to the lack of information Steven has about his baby brother's illness and it gives a realistic portrayal of how a child can think a congenital disease might be contagious because no information they have received says otherwise and regular diseases in a child's daily life are usually contagious. The parents are given updates on the child's prognosis, but "children's need for updated information about the progress of the disease and its prognosis are often forgotten", and many children do not understand what the concept of change in the condition over time means (Dyregrov 2008: 107). Steven knows that his baby brother needs a big heart operation and that there are "a lot of things wrong with the baby", that his illness is "very rare" and "degenerative" (Oppel 2015: 5). Based on this information alone, most people would have a rather bleak outlook at the outcome, and with no updated information, this view perpetuates and Steven reacts by trying to save his brother through his dreams. Despite there being more research on a child's response to the loss of a parent than a child's response to losing a sibling, studies suggest that "loss of a sibling is potentially traumatic" (Sood et al. 2006: 115). When a sibling dies, the living child must then cope with their own grief while also adjusting to their new family environment and the parents' "ability to fulfill parental roles may be compromised" (Sood et al. 116). In a sense, the surviving child loses their parents as well, at

least the parents they had before the death occurred. Although Steven's baby brother has not died, he still notices changes in his parents and often comments on their sadness, for example when he sees his father sitting alone on the bed and Steven thinks that he has never "seen him sadder" (Oppel 127).

Chapter Conclusion

As the analysis reflects, *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* do provide realistic portrayals of childhood grief and potential trauma with the inclusion of symptoms that correspond with recent grief and trauma theory. The child protagonists' support system is lackluster, they are kept in the dark by their caregivers in regards to open communication and updated information, and they are repeatedly left to fend for themselves. By encompassing fictional representations of childhood grief and child emotional neglect, the books can function as utensils in a greater toolkit as a form of preparation or education, because research and experience "has shown that mental preparation and planning before a death or other critical event leads to a much better handling" (Dyregrov 2008: 125) instead of taking things as they come and hope for the best. Early help and support can reduce the chances of chronic or delayed grief developing, "as well as the chance of developing post-traumatic stress reactions" (2008: 167). Again, the emphasis is on preparation, help, communication, information, and support when faced with a critical event.

The following chapter will elaborate on the importance of recognizing recurrent dreams and nightmares as potential symptoms of grief and trauma, as well as emphasizing the significant effect one's daytime experiences can have on dreams. Books can act as helpful tools to identify and understand emotions, and so can dreams and nightmares. Chapter two argues that because the lack of support and communication in their daily lives, the child protagonists unconsciously create monsters, spurred by the wish-fulfillment and guilt formed in their awakened state, as a tool to help them process and accept the situation they are experiencing and the desires they have repressed.

Chapter 2: Dreaming of Monsters

Introduction

There is a general consensus of the important role diurnal experiences have on one's dreams within both psychological and biological studies, as will be shown in this chapter. As early as the 2nd century, the diviner Artemidorus of Daldis suggested that the dreamer's daily surroundings should be taken into consideration when interpreting dreams (Kramer 2006: 3), a notion that was further developed by Sigmund Freud centuries later, along with his theory of the dream being "the (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed, repressed) wish" (Freud 1913: 136). Although dreams have fascinated humanity for centuries, there is no all-encompassing theory that manages to perfectly explain neither the meaning nor function of dreaming.

At one point in history, and still some places in the world today, dreams were thought to be messages from the divine and/or supernatural. As time progressed, dreams were seen as reflections of physiological changes in the dreamer. Because the origin of dreams had been placed into the hands of the divine in earlier times, there had not been a reason to inquire any other explanation. But when focus shifted toward scientific explanations, the meaning and function of dreaming had to be revised and elaborated upon. Freud launched his dream theories that claimed dreams were the royal road to knowledge of the unconscious, and this was seen as a logical explanation for decades to come in the field of psychoanalytic dream theory. More recently, however, the branch of neuroscience has taken the lead, but there is still no shared agreement on the most efficient and factual way to travel the royal road to the unconscious, or if dreams even have potential for deeper meaning. But what is a dream? With such an expansive history, the term 'dream' can mean a lot of different things, so it is necessary to define what sort of dream I am referring to in this chapter. When I talk about dreams here, I mean dreams/fantasies that one experiences while asleep and unconscious.

Dream sequences frequently appear in literature, regardless of genre and age category. Nevertheless, I was unable to find much theory on dreams in literature, and few books have tried to cross the boundaries between art and scholarship, and between art and science, in the last decades (Hahn 2016: 2). My hope for this chapter is therefore to help build a bridge between art and science, while also further emphasizing my repeated statement of children's literature being worthwhile of close readings and nuanced analyses. Dreams have been used

as a literary device in all types of literature for centuries, often to act as a vision or an offer of knowledge unknown to the dreamer while awake, but also to foreshadow events to come or as a metaphor filled with symbolism. Here is the difference between real life and literature when it comes to dreams: while we are uncertain whether there is a deeper meaning of dreams in real life, the dreams in literature are there for a reason, namely to communicate a deeper meaning.

With the assumption that most authors in the Western hemisphere these days share the collective knowledge most of us have gained from the popularization of psychoanalysis, the role of symbolic material in dreams is ingrained in most of us. However, the implicit is not always easy to understand, especially not for children, depending on their development, and different readers will understand the significance of symbols differently. This chapter therefore aims to make the implicit explicit, as well as offering a literary analysis of dreams that bridges the gap between children's literature and dream theories. Because, like children's grief and child emotional neglect, children's dreams are also largely unexplored in professional literature, and I want to offer more knowledge on the subject.

Most of the discrepancy within dream theory is on the one hand, people who think psychoanalysis is too interpretative with a tendency to over-interpret, and on the other hand, people who think the neurophysiological approach is reductionistic. My goal is not to say which approach is the right approach—not even professional dream researchers can agree on that—but I want to utilize the dream theories that support my statement of how the child protagonists' dreams function as wish-fulfillment for a wish that originated in daytime because of an emotional reaction. With this, I hope to show an approach of how dream theory can be used to analyze dreams in children's literature with similar depth as to what one would analyze dreams in literature for adults. An updated and diverse understanding of dreams can provide helpful information in contribution to discussions of dreams in literature.

As with real life, and perhaps even more so in literature, dreams can be used as a tool to reveal more about the unconscious. By analyzing the child protagonists' dreams, my goal is to reveal more about their unconscious. I will build upon dream theory to deepen the literary analysis, but also to show the many angles from which a dream can be explored, whether it be in literature or in real life. Thus, in this chapter, I will present dream theories from various sources that are relevant to the novels I analyze. Inspired by both classical and modern dream theory, I will apply dream theories such as Freud's wish-fulfillment, Jung's 'Big Dreams', dreams as therapy, nightmares, the effect emotions and one's daily life experiences can have

on dreams, and Ernest Hartmann's idea of the dream's 'Central Image', as a starting point for my literary analysis.

In this chapter I argue that the child protagonists of *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* view their dreams as a safe space where they can process their daily lives, and where the monsters show up as a result of the protagonists' repressed wishes unconsciously made in their awakened state. The dreams function as a safe space where the characters can explore their emotions, and the monsters in their dreams are there to help them with the healing process. The child protagonists' unconscious generates these monsters to confront the wishes they cannot and will not consciously admit to as a way to lighten the weight of the subsequent guilt they are feeling and to help them heal. The monsters will be the theme of the next chapter, while in this chapter I focus on the relationship between diurnal experiences, emotions, suppressed wishes, dreams, and nightmares. I argue that the dreams act as an avenue and vehicle for processing distressing emotions from the protagonists' daily lives, and this process is forced upon them by the dream monsters. Moreover, as stated in chapter one, dreams and nightmares can be a symptom of childhood grief and trauma, and the connection between the child protagonists' grief and trauma symptoms are reflected in their dreams, examples of which will be given in the analysis.

Wish-fulfillment

"The dream is the (disguised) fulfilment of a (suppressed, repressed) wish," observed Sigmund Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1913: 136). Although Freud and his theories are contested in several scientific and academic fields, including literature, it would not be possible or even fruitful to conduct an exploration of dreams without referral to his dream theories. It should also be noted that most people tend to refer to Freud's first edition of Interpretation, but in reality, he continuously revised his dream theories, and the final (eighth) edition was published 29 years after the first edition (Horowitz 2016: 5). Although it might be interesting to read and compare all editions, I can only work from the edition I had access to (the first edition), and the main ideas I was inspired by are Freud's concept of dreams functioning as wish-fulfillment and how dreams can tell us something about unconscious processes. Since the start of his theory on dreams, Freud referred to children's dreams, and he was of the opinion that the study of children's dreams could teach us "the origin, the essential nature and the function of dreams" (Colace 2010: 37). He shared the view of many of his contemporaries, such as Jung, that children were thought to be closer to the primitive mind and thus their minds could reveal the core, inborn aspects of human qualities such as the

unconscious. This notion will be explained in greater detail in chapter three in relation to the collective unconscious, but it is helpful to understand the view Freud had on children's dreams. This does not mean that children's dreams cannot be intricate, and Freud admitted that "children sometimes show complex and more obscure dreams" (1913: footnote, 111).

Alongside Freud, Carl Jung shared his dream theories. In *Symbols and the Interpretation of Dreams*, Jung acknowledges Freud's theories of the unconscious mind and the fact that dreams can have significant impact on the psyche, but in Jung's view there is more focus on the symbolism dreams portray and on the concept of a collective unconsciousness. Neither did Jung agree with Freud's claim of the dream acting as the guardian of sleep, "since dreams just as often disturb sleep" (1961: 222). Jung analyzed dreams, but he differed from Freud in his approach: with more thought posed to the act of transference, Jung believed the analyst and the analysand should work together to better understand the analysand's dreams. He did not subscribe to Freud's method of "free association", because eventually, "anyone who talks long enough will inevitably betray himself by what he says and what he purposely refrains from saying" (Jung 1961: 187-188). Free association shows the existence of "associable material floating about", and not the real meaning behind dreams (Jung 1961: 188). While Jung does not dismiss the idea of association, he thought there should be more attention placed on the actual form and statement of the dream itself (Jung 1961: 189), and the real task of the analysis is to "understand why the dream has chosen its own individual expression" (Jung 1961: 191). In this way, how the dream was expressed, for example by exploring the symbols produced by the dream, could reveal information about the dreamer's unconscious. It was, after all, the attempt to understand dreams that "first enabled us to investigate the unconscious aspect of conscious psychic events" (Jung 1961: 187).

I include Jung's view on dreams because of his emphasis on dream structure, which proves beneficial when applied to an analysis of fictional dreams written down and thus already existing as structured and unchanging. Furthermore, I subscribe to Jung's understanding that there are other motives than sexual drives that affect the human psyche. In comparison to Freud's "almost exclusive interest in sex", Jung claims that sexual motives are secondary to "hunger, the power drive, ambition, fanaticism, envy, revenge […]" (1961: 215). Jung does not downplay the role of dreams, and he agrees that many dreams arise from emotional disturbance, but he has a more theatrical approach to the subject with his focus mostly placed on the importance of symbols and symbolism, archetypes and 'the divine drama of life'. Archetypes will be connected to the dream monsters in the literary analysis in chapter

three. Furthermore, Jung pointed out recurrent dreams as being noteworthy as such dreams "compensate a defect in one's conscious attitude" or they can "date from a traumatic moment", and the relation between recurrent dreams and trauma has been proven by more modern dream theories. In addition, we can recall from the previous chapter that recurrent dreams are a known symptom of potential trauma.

Although contemporary dream theorists do not think that a dream is always based on a forbidden wish (Budd 2004: 257), there are studies that reveal findings in support of the theory of wish-fulfillment. In his study on children's dreams, psychologist Claudio Colace found that children's dreams often act as wish-fulfillment as "*a solution of a state of affective uneasiness (sorrow, dissatisfaction, impatience) […] during the day*" (2010: 256, italics in original). This illuminates the influence diurnal experiences can have on dreams, and the wishes that appear in dreams are "invariably represented by an intense emotional daytime experience" (2010: 237). This is not always the case, but what I want to take from this claim is that dreams *can* function as wish-fulfillment, that intense emotions can influence dreams, and that what happens in a child's daily life often inspires the wish that shows up in the dream. What becomes apparent here, and in many studies on children's dreams, however, is the idea of children's dreams being less complex than adults' and therefore "the simple forms of children's dreams" can help us understand the functions of dreaming (Colace 2013: 161), similar to Freud's reasoning shared above. This idea is prevalent in many circles, where the child is thought to be closer to origin, more primitive, and less influenced by the world in all senses. Within psychoanalysis, this view is based on the development of the ego and superego, and defense mechanisms such as censorship, disfigurement, distortion, condensation, etc. As a child grows older, the superego develops as the "internalization of parental influence, as well as of the influence of social and cultural impositions" (Colace 2010: 193). Thus, superego functions are more complete in older children, and the superego "manifests itself essentially as a sense of guilt" (2010: 195).

This is important to the literary analysis because both protagonists are older children and their repressed wishes are triggered by their guilt, as will be shown with examples. In this sense, dreams can function as an opportunity to track cognitive and psychosocial development, and there is "abundant evidence of developmental changes in the process, structure, and content of children's dreams" (Siegel 2005: 153). Despite this, children's dreams are "an area of limited research in the professional literature" (Cooper 1999: 138). This does not mean that the dreams one experience in childhood have less of an impact. As

several studies show, as well as psychoanalysis, it seems to be the other way around where the dreams one remembers best are the ones from childhood.

Underlying Emotions, Big Dreams, and the CI

The importance of emotions in dreams is widely recognized within both biological and psychological studies (Hartmann 2010: 197). Not the emotion in the dream itself, but the *underlying emotion* of the dreamer. Studies that have started at times when emotions might be heightened, such as times of loss and after trauma, show the clearest results of dreams being guided by an underlying emotion. This can play a role in which dreams are remembered, as "evidence suggests that more emotionally intense dreams are better remembered" (2010: 212). Such dreams are often labeled as 'big dreams', a term coined by Jung.

Big dreams have been reported throughout history in various cultures, and big dreams are still being studied by researchers and therapists (Bulkeley & Hartmann 2011: 157). The idea here is based on the reported significance and impact of a 'big dream', and from a scientific perspective, big dreams "represent extraordinary expressions of cognitive, emotional, and physiological potential in the dreaming mind" (Bulkeley & Hartmann 157). But how are big dreams measured? According to Dr. Ernest Hartmann, psychoanalyst and dream researcher, all big dreams have one powerful image that stands out and is typically what the dreamer remembers upon waking. This is the image that "carries the lasting emotional power and what makes the "big" dream big" (Hartmann 2008: 46). The creation of this theory shares a clear connection with Jung's dream theories, for example when he stated that, in many cases, "emotion and symbol are actually one and the same thing" (1961: 249). However, Hartmann termed this emotionally impactful image as the 'central image', hereby referred to as the *CI*. This image is a creation and not a replay or reenactment of a daytime experience, and within the language of dreams, the CI is described as a picture metaphor or explanatory metaphor for the dreamer's emotions and emotional concerns (Hartmann 2008: 55). To define a CI as "powerful" entails how emotionally important or memorable it is to the dreamer.

In his research, Hartmann found that "the details of the story often change, but the powerful CI, if there is one, remains constant" (2008: 46), implying that a powerful CI will help the dreamer remember the dream, thus rendering it as 'big'. In a similar study conducted in 2011 with fellow dream researcher Kelly Bulkeley, the authors found that the most memorable dreams had much higher CI intensity scores (Hartmann & Bulkeley, 2011: 162). The memorable dreams were found to feature a higher number of nonhuman characters, fantastic beings, and family characters, among other elements, as well as showing a

prevalence of physical aggression and magical events. Many of the memorable dreams also had references to both nature and death.

From his thorough research on the CI, Hartmann stated that he agreed with Freud in that the dream is the royal road to the unconscious, and that the CI "may be the fast lane on this royal road", suggesting that by identifying the CI and its undercurrent emotion, one can gain insight into the unconscious more effectively (Hartmann 2008: 54). With this in mind, I will identify the CI in the dream sequences presented in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest*, and use them to act as metaphors of how the child protagonists' daily lives and emotions affect their dreams. Furthermore, by following the logic behind the CI, one could employ this as an analytical tool when analyzing literary dreams in that identifying the CI will in turn lead directly to the dreamer's primary emotion, and so reveal details of the dreamer's motivations, desires, and worries.

Grief dreams and nightmares

In lieu of the proven impact emotions have on dreams, it should not come as a surprise that dreaming can be a symptom of childhood grief and trauma, as was declared in the previous chapter. This does not necessarily have to be a negative thing, quite the contrary. The incident that might cause such dreams is of course unfortunate, but these kinds of dreams are thought to be part of the healing process as they can "closely reflect stages of the grieving process" (Adams & Hyde 2008: 59), and/or the brain's attempt to protect itself from and processing the intense emotions and experiences happening while awake. Within some circles of dream research, the connection between psychotherapy and the process of dreaming has been illuminated where the main argument is that dreams and psychotherapy alike can serve as a safe space where one can make connections (Cooper 1999; Hartmann 1995; Mallon 2005). The connections made in the dream are between "recently experienced material (day residue)" and "old memory pathways, which may involve fears and wishes" (Hartmann 1995: 215), which links back to the concept of wish-fulfillment and the role of diurnal experiences, but this process is also seen as a way to build new memory paths.

A dream does not only connect what one already has experienced, however, but it can also provide a new connection which can be "used by the prepared waking mind to solve the problem" (Hartmann 1995: 219). In studies done on dreams as potential problem-solvers, it has been found that "dreams frequently provide solutions or partial solutions to the problems" (Hartmann 1995: 218). This is not to say that dreaming is identical to psychotherapy or that all dreams have some magical problem-solving abilities, but I am including this to show that

dreams can be helpful in processing and healing challenging emotions and/or trauma. This is especially relevant when it comes to children's dreams, because as shown in chapter one, childhood grief and the trauma of emotional neglect are often overlooked or misunderstood by adults, thus resulting in the children's grief and trauma never being fully acknowledged and consequently never processed or properly worked through.

Within grief theory, the notion of expressing feelings before one can start to heal is prevalent, but this fails to include children who, because of their age and development, might "lack the verbal structure and coping skills that adults often take for granted in resolving loss" (Cooper 1999: 139). Thus, for children especially, dreams can function as "a less threatening approach toward expressing and experiencing feelings than verbal dialogue" (Cooper 139). Communication is still needed in order to help children comprehend their dreams, and in doing so, the child can hopefully work towards acceptance and understanding of the lived experiences articulated through their dreams. The fact that grieving children recall their dreams more frequently than non-grieving children (Cooper 1999; Mallon 2005) can be an indirect verification of the abovementioned dream theories, in the sense that in order to heal, the dream offers the child a safe space to work through intense emotions and/or traumatic episodes that occurred in their awakened state. In turn, since grieving children recall their dreams more readily, such dreams can provide an opportunity for the child and adults to discuss and try to understand the dreams' messages, or "the waking events that triggered them", and thus "enable the child to feel more empowered" (Mallon 2005: 45). Based on this, dreams seem to carry significant meaning for the grieving child, and despite grieving generally happening after a loss, dreams relating to bereavement "can occur before a death as a form of anticipatory grief" (Mallon 2005: 43), and this is in line with the theory on anticipatory grief presented in chapter one. The dreams analyzed from *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* happen as part of an anticipatory grief process since the loss has not happened at the start of the novels or at the start of the child protagonists' dreams.

At this point, however, attention must be directed toward nightmares, because the professional literature shows that grieving children typically experience nightmares and that dreams reported in therapy are more likely to be nightmares (Mallon 2005; Lempen & Midgley 2012). Dr. Hartmann argues in his article, "The Nightmare is the Most Useful Dream", that the nightmare is "the paradigmatic dream" because it is the nightmare that most clearly shows us what is present in all dreams (1999: 2). Despite this and despite nightmares being common in children, nightmares have "received little attention" in professional literature (Leung &

Robson 1993: 233). Nightmares should be taken seriously, especially if they are recurrent and persistent, as "recurrent distressing dreams are symptomatic of post-traumatic stress disorder in children" and this indicates that a psychological evaluation of the child and family is recommended (Leung & Robson 1993; Mallon 2005).

But what is the difference between a dream and a nightmare? Is it necessary to differentiate the two? Most of the recent theory I found during my research has revolved around dreams rather than nightmares, but since the novels I am analyzing contain both dreams and nightmares—and sometimes a hybrid between the two—I will try to explain the difference, even though, in my opinion, there is no need to distinguish the two so adamantly because the two often bleed together, and what is a nightmare but a bad dream? According to Dr. Hartmann, there is no perfect definition of the nightmare, but it is "accepted that the nightmare is a long frightening dream, which awakens the sleeper […]" (1999: 2). With this in mind, it seems the tell-tale signs of a nightmare is the emotion it evokes (primarily fear) and that it disrupts sleep to the degree of awakening the sleeper. To expand upon this, an online study done on nightmare themes found that nightmares also can contain emotions such as grief, disgust, and anger, and that the definition of nightmares "still focuses on threats to survival, security, or physical integrity" (Schredl & Göritz 2018: 465). Even though this study was conducted 19 years after Dr. Hartmann's article, this recent study found that "current definitions of nightmare content are too narrow" (2018: 465), i.e., the study of nightmares does not appear to have made much significant progress during those years and no perfect definition exists. The importance of the emotions sparked by the dream do however seem to have the most to say when it comes to differentiating between what can be defined as a dream and what is a nightmare, in that nightmares typically evokes distress in the dreamer.

Thus, in my analysis of the dreams and nightmares in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest*, I will refer to the dreams as nightmares based on the emotions portrayed within and without the dream/nightmare sequences, i.e., if the protagonist's emotion is described in terms of fear and frightful, anxious, stressed, I will present the dream as being a nightmare. As mentioned, however, the protagonists' dreams and nightmares do end up blending and functioning as *one* shared dream, so this distinction is not always easy to make. Nevertheless, the link between dreams and emotions presented by several dream theories is exemplified in the novels, as my analysis will reveal.

Analysis

Dreams and nightmares function as subplots in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest*, and the line between dreams and reality is often blurred. Thus, since this distinction is not always easily discernible in the novels, it is more helpful to think of the transitions from focused waking thoughts to dreaming happening in a continuum, where one goes from focused waking thoughts to looser thought, then to reverie, to daydreaming, and finally to dreaming (Hartmann 1996; 2008: 165; 52). The application of blurred lines and dissociation makes it challenging to know whether the happenings of the child protagonists' dreams only occur within their dreams, or if they also experience this while awake. This conundrum could be a chapter in its own right, but for my thesis I have chosen to interpret the dream sequences as dreams in the sense that they happen when the protagonists are asleep. The analysis shows how the emotional distress from the child protagonists' daily life triggers a wish too painful and taboo to speak into conscious reality, which leads them to repress said wish and thus having the now-unconscious wish show up in their dreams in the shape of monsters in an attempt to heal with the help of wish-fulfillment and acceptance of reality.

A Monster Calls

> *And a part of you wished it would just end*, said the monster, *even if it meant losing her*.
> Conor nodded, barely able to speak.
> *And the nightmare began. The nightmare that always ended with—*
> "I let her go," Conor choked out. "I could have held on but I let her go."
> *And that*, the monster said, *is the truth*.
>
> (Ness, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*, 2011, p. 222, italics in original)

This quote exemplifies a counterintuitive discovery of wish-fulfillment taking place in a nightmare. How can something as unpleasant and frightening as a nightmare lead to the fulfillment of a wish? Freud stated that the existence of anxiety dreams prevented "a generalisation of the thesis that the dream is a wish-fulfilment […]", but at the same time he admitted to the possibility of wish-fulfillment through painful and fearful dreams upon interpretation (1913: 114). In many ways, the wish-fulfillment dream and nightmare perform the same function, namely that of affective reestablishment or emotional regulation (Colace 2013: 168). But even if they might achieve similar results, it does not mean that they are the

same. According to Colace, wish-fulfillment dreams resolve disturbing affective states that derive from ordinary life experiences, while extraordinary intense emotions and/or traumatic experiences can result in nightmares (2013: 168). The nightmare often happens in an attempt to contextualize the "predominant emotion" in a way to regulate the extreme emotion, and the intensity of this correlates with Dr. Hartmann's theory of nightmares presenting the dreamer's emotional concern in the most evident manner (Colace 2013: 168). The origin of the repressed wish in a nightmare is often associated with thoughts and emotions that are too distressing for the dreamer to consciously acknowledge, and because of this intense repression there is a "feeling of repulsion towards the wish", which in turn causes the wish to gain expression only in a disfigured state (Freud 1913: 120).

Based on this, these kinds of repressed wishes can show up as nightmares, and as shown in the quote from *A Monster Calls* above, this is what happens to the main character, Conor. Although he rejects his repressed wish throughout most of the book, often shown by Ness through the same tactic mentioned in chapter one, namely the placement of hyphens to cut off a thought or a sentence to create the effect of suppression and avoidance. This happens on the very first page of the book, where Conor has awakened from a nightmare, and the reader receives the first description of said nightmare, but the ending is left unknown with the insertion of a hyphen: "The one that always ended with—" (Ness 2011: 15). This creates the effect of active suppression as it is employed throughout the novel, and it leaves the reader with both curiosity about the nightmare as well as the inkling of the ending being so painful to Conor that he refuses to admit it into consciousness. This nightmare is not just a nightmare, it is "*the* nightmare", the "*real* nightmare", "the *nightmare*", which the author continuously underlines with the usage of italicization to portray this difference (Ness 15, 34, 63, italics in original). The constant emphasis on this nightmare implies the recurrency of it, and as presented in the previous chapter and this chapter, recurrent dreams and nightmares can be symptoms of childhood grief and trauma. But why does this nightmare happen? Based on the nightmare theories above, the nightmare is a result of an extraordinary emotion or trauma, and with knowledge of the influence daytime experiences can have on dreams, the content of Conor's nightmare can be traced to his awakened life.

As discussed in chapter one, Conor is experiencing a lot of distressing situations, and it is his mother's illness that particularly influences his recurrent nightmare. This connection is not directly apparent at first because the complete content of his nightmare is not revealed until the very last part of the novel. Glimpses of the nightmare are shown, and there is a

repetition of "the darkness"; "the screaming"; "the falling"; "the terror"; "the emptiness" (Ness 15; 64; 67; 95; 143), as well as the "terrible, terrible thing that happened at the end" (Ness 147), used to describe the nightmare without revealing the wish Conor has repressed. Eventually, as things take a turn for the worse in Conor's daily life and his mother is hospitalized, the nightmare comes "every time he slept now, and worse than before, if that was possible" (Ness 189), portraying the connection between a declining daily life and an increased activity of the nightmare. As Conor's daytime experiences create more intense emotions in him, such as guilt, loneliness, sadness, anger, etc., his nightmare also intensifies, which corelates with the nightmare theories above.

When Conor's mother reveals that the medicine is not working and she will die, Conor's nightmare is shown in full, and it ends with him letting go off his mother's hands while she is hanging from a cliff. There is a monster under her "that would eat his mother alive", and this monster is "the one he was properly afraid of" (Ness 211-212). But before he can wake up, he is forced to tell the truth, which is the repressed wish he has been ignoring and rejecting all along, but he still refuses because it hurts so much to admit such a wish. "It'll kill me if I do", Conor says when told to unveil the truth, and that he "deserve[s] the worst" because he has been "thinking it for the longest time", showing how guilty he feels based on this wish and that it has tormented him for a long time (Ness 219, 221). In fact, Conor claims that he has known his mother was not going to make it "almost from the beginning" (Ness 221), and there his wish originated, the wish for it all to be over. But for it to be over, it meant that his mother must die, and this is why the wish was so heavily repressed and Conor was so adamant from the start of the novel that "What happened in the nightmare was something no one else needed to know" (Ness 16), which is a clear demonstration of his guilt and shame. This is further emphasized by the emotions and bodily sensation Conor experiences as he tells the truth, where he dreams that he spews fire from his mouth and "then the fire ate the world, wiping away everything, wiping him away with it", to which he reacts with relief because this was "at last, the punishment he deserves" (Ness 220). Here three things are happening: 1) the symbolism of his guilt burning him from the inside out; 2) another suppressed wish is fulfilled, which is the wish to be punished (also shown examples of in chapter one); and 3) the completion of Conor's pre-conceived belief of him being killed if he tells the truth. The burning of everything can also symbolize a cleansing, a rebirth and/or a new beginning, where all the old is burned away and Conor awakens with a clear mind.

By revealing the entirety of the nightmare, it is possible to pinpoint the central image (CI) of the nightmare. As mentioned earlier, the CI is an emotionally powerful image that the

dreamer typically remembers upon waking. Conor is shown numerous times to experience flashes from his nightmare while awake, but most of these do not show the actual CI, which is what happens at the end of the nightmare. Based on the CI acting as a "*picture metaphor* or *explanatory metaphor* for the dreamer's emotions" (Hartmann 2008: 55, italics in original) and thus leads to knowledge of the dreamer's underlying emotion, what best exemplifies this in Conor's nightmare is when Conor is holding on to his mother's hands while the monster advances up the cliff, and it ends with him letting her go. This is the complete CI of his nightmare: from Conor's perspective, he is watching himself lose the grip on his mother's hands and the fiery shadow monster with its flashing teeth right below is ready to devour her whole. This is supported by the examples mentioned earlier in this analysis, where Conor repeatedly refuses to say or think about what happens at the end of his nightmare, and this reluctance is in itself proof of this being the part that upsets Conor the most, i.e., this is the CI because it is a metaphor for him letting his mother die, which is based on the underlying and intense emotion of his guilt.

It is also interesting to note how many details of Conor's nightmare relate to the study on big dreams mentioned above, where the most memorable dreams had "more fantastic beings", more "family characters and references to death", as well as memorable words noticed in such dreams often related to "fire and flying" (Bulkeley & Hartmann 2011: 164). Based on results from quantitative studies on dreams, big dreams showed a tendency to include "primal" qualities such as more physical aggression, more intense imagery, more nightmare emotions, more fantastic/imaginary beings, etc. (2011: 165). Conor's nightmare can thus be used as a literary example of a 'big dream' with a powerful CI and consequently extraordinarily intense emotions.

What saves Conor from his nightmare, however, is a different dream. When he awakens from *the* nightmare at the start of the book, another dream arrives in the form of a yew tree at 12.07 AM. This time stamp is noteworthy because it foreshadows his mother's death, which is shown to happen around this time at the end of the novel. This is in accordance with recent dream theory findings of dreams possibly containing inklings of future events (Wamsley 2021), as well as Freud's statement of numbers in dreams being "of especial significance by superstition" (Freud 1913: 325), and Jung's notion that dreams can "prepare, announce, or warn about certain situations, often long before they actually happen" (Jung 1961: 208).

Although Conor is shown to be awake awhen he sees the yew tree "In real, waking life. Not in a dream" (Ness 2011: 21), the continuum of states of consciousness mentioned

earlier shows the many stages between fully awake thoughts and dreaming, and with this in mind, it is likely that Conor's brain is still in a more relaxed state after waking from the nightmare; not fully asleep, but not fully awake, either. It can be argued that the monster is real, and while this question will be explored more in the next chapter, it is not the main topic in this chapter. Here, the yew tree monster will be treated as a figment of Conor's psyche that visits him in dreams, whether they be daydreams or dreams occurring while asleep. Conor also states several times after meeting the yew tree monster that "It had been a dream"; "It's only a dream"; "Of course it was a dream" (Ness 26; 48; 53), and so on, adding to the diffuseness of the separation.

Another important consideration is the state Conor is in when he wakes, as this will influence the kind of dream he has next. Since he just experienced a nightmare, it is likely that his emotions will be spiked and more on the negative side, such as fear, anxiety, terror, helplessness, etc. As the dream theories above have highlighted, emotions will often have an effect on dreams. The prevalent emotion within Conor and the emotion which attracts the yew tree monster is the guilt he is repressing, and with this there is a connection between his nightmare and this dream. It is Conor's guilt that is the underlying emotion which causes the yew tree monster to arrive, and this dream contextualizes the dominant emotion or emotional concern of the dreamer into—most often—an explanatory metaphor (Hartmann 1996: 147). Based on this, the yew tree monster is the contextualization or manifestation of Conor's overwhelming guilt. Moreover, the yew tree monster is the CI of this dream. As the dream turns into a recurring dream by the duration of the novel, it is a bit different than the recurrent nightmare in that this dream has varying content while the recurrent nightmare remains the same every time. There is however one recurrent constant in Conor's dreams as well, and that is the yew tree. Based on this, and on Conor remembering the yew tree while awake as well as the underlying emotion being the same as in the nightmare, namely guilt, the yew tree monster is the CI of the dreams. But with a monster present, why do I refer to these as dreams and not as nightmares?

According to the aforementioned differentiation between dream and nightmare, Conor is experiencing a dream based on his emotions: he is not afraid anymore. In fact, upon their first meeting, he tells the yew tree monster that he has "seen worse" (Ness 2011: 22), a clear reference to his nightmare, and another indication of how frightening the nightmare truly is since not even a "real, honest-to-goodness monster" is scarier (Ness 21).

At the end of the first yew tree dream, Conor is still in a state of dreaming since the last thing he remembers is "the monster's mouth roaring open to eat him alive" (Ness 23).

This can mean several things, and perhaps the most striking one is the symbolism of his guilt eating him alive. Another interpretation can be the integration of the monster and Conor, having them form into a sort of symbiosis. When Conor interacts with the monster again, the depth of this symbiosis is revealed. The yew tree monster says it has come for the truth, but not just any truth. Conor's truth, the truth he hides, "the thing you are most afraid of" (Ness 52). Immediately, Conor thinks about his nightmare, but he convinces himself that there's no way the monster can know about that. The monster, however, does know. In exchange for the truth, which the monster terms "the fourth tale", the monster will tell Conor three tales. The monster insists that it was Conor who called it forth, but Conor denies this, and this can be seen as the unconscious at work where he refuses to admit to his suppressed thoughts. This interaction shows the reason why the yew tree monster is there, for Conor to tell the truth, "*For this is why you called me*" (Ness 52, italics in original), which can be directly traced to another wish Conor has repressed: the wish to tell the truth and unburden himself. Here Conor's conscious and unconscious is at war with each other, as well as his dream and nightmare portraying wishes that are different but still related to one another in the sense that his dream wish was made to relieve him from the nightmare wish.

Conor's conscious mind desperately hopes that the yew tree monster is there to help his mother, which is a more acceptable and thus conscious wish, and this can be related to children's tendency to rely upon fantastical thinking during duress, as stated in chapter one. This wish clearly derives from Conor's daytime experiences, while the wish to tell the truth seems to be inspired by both his daily life and his nightmare, in a way to accept reality and to forgive himself for the nightmare wish. The dreams starring the yew tree monster show clear ties to incidents taking place while Conor is awake, which again is an example of the dream theory of diurnal experiences influencing dreams. For example, after talking to his absent father during the day, which triggers feelings of annoyance, sadness, and disappointment in him, Conor dreams of a selfish man the following night where the man is "*punished for his selfishness*" by the yew tree (Ness 135, italics in original). Similarly, after his grandmother has told Conor that he has to live with her "when this is all over" (Ness 62), to which Conor reacts with anger and feigned ignorance of the reality of his mother's prognosis, he dreams of an evil queen who secretly is a witch. These dreams can by definition count as typical wish-fulfillment dreams as they derive from ordinary life experiences in order to resolve disturbing affective states such as Conor's annoyance with his father or his anger at his grandmother.

The true healing properties of the dream and nightmare only happen when the two blend together, however. During a dream featuring the yew tree, the dream world suddenly

changes and Conor finds himself "inside the nightmare" (Ness 167). Here, the yew tree monster forces the truth out of Conor, but Conor cannot bring himself to utter it. At one point, Conor says "Help me" to the yew tree, which confirms that the yew tree is indeed there to help him (Ness 205). In this dreamscape where an element from his dreams collides with his nightmare, Conor compares the monsters. He thinks of the nightmare monster as "The real monster", and it was the dreadfulness of this monster that caused Conor to tell the yew tree monster that he had seen worse, because "here was the worse thing", referring to the nightmare monster (Ness 211-212). The yew tree witnesses Conor go through every stage of the nightmare, and it is relentless in demanding the truth. After Conor has told his truth and admitted to his repressed wish, as shown in the analysis of the nightmare above, the yew tree redefines his wish into something new, something more acceptable: "*You were merely wishing for the end of pain* […]. *An end to how it isolated you. It is the most human wish of all*" (Ness 223, italics in original). This confirms how the yew tree was in Conor's dreams in an act of wish-fulfillment, and this is an example of how dreams can function as a safe space for healing. As Conor understands at the end, the monster came because he "had needed it and his need had somehow called it" (Ness 235), in a way validating the relationship between emotions and dreams mentioned by most of the dream theories used in this analysis. This does not mean that this can function as a real or true experience, but it is an example of how some children's literature contains realistic and theory-supported depictions of dreams and nightmares.

By depicting dreams as a symptom of childhood grief and potential trauma, *A Monster Calls* puts into words the reality of something that often goes unnoticed, and this can be used as an example of how a dream can mean something more than what is on the surface and of how nightmares can be helpful.

The Nest

> "All I knew was that this dream made me feel better. Waking up from it, I'd just felt happier. It happened sometimes, a dream that cast a kind of hopeful light from the night into the daytime."
>
> (Oppel, Kenneth, *The Nest*, 2015, p. 26)

This quote from *The Nest* does an effective job of portraying the healing factor dreams can have. Here we see a reversal of the abovementioned effect daily life can have on dreams, where the main character Steven says the hope he feels in his dream follows him into waking, i.e., his dream makes him feel better about his life. In that sense, both the conscious and unconscious mind have an effect on the other, and the line between these two is not as clear-cut as it often appears. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Steven has recurrent dreams and nightmares, and this is established as something he always has experienced with his mother saying that he has "always had the most interesting dreams" and his father saying he has "always had pretty intense dreams" (Oppel 2015: 25; 99). Like *A Monster Calls*, the line between dreams and nightmares is not always distinctive in *The Nest*, either. The dream that Steven refers to in the quote above is the same dream that the novel opens with, where Steven dreams that angels have come to help his baby brother.

As shown in chapter one, Steven's baby brother suffers from an unknown disease that is life-threatening, and the angels showing up in his dreams is in clear connection to a wish Steven has in his daily life: to help his brother get better. On the surface, this does not seem like a wish that would need to be repressed, but as Steven's dream repeats, it grows deeper and darker. It is more understandable that Steven would repress his wish when his dreams reveal how the angels will help his baby brother: by replacing him altogether, akin to traditional changeling-stories. This wish would be harder to admit to oneself, a view which is further cemented when Steven overhears his mother tell his father about a similar dream she has had, where she dreamt that they had been given the wrong baby at the hospital, and all he hears at the end is his mother crying and the word "ashamed" (Oppel 139-140). Not only does this reveal that his mother has repressed a similar wish to Steven's, but her being ashamed by this dream shows Steven that this is the correct reaction to such a dream. Now Steven's guilt is two-fold: on the one hand, he feels guilty because he wants to help his parents and his brother, and on the other hand he feels guilty from having such a wish and dreams. Even as Steven consciously says he does not want this dream any longer, his unconscious does not seem to agree when the creatures in his dreams tell him that "You want to come. That's why you're here", and that everything would be better if he was "at least honest" with himself (Oppel 125; 175), insinuating that he still is not fully honest with himself. This creates an unhealthy circle of never-ending guilt, where Steven's dreams—which are based on his feelings of guilt while awake—create even more guilt.

The repetition of this dream points to its significance in that it might be a symptom of something deeper, but similar to Conor's dreams, Steven's dreams contain varying content and they develop in parallel to his awakened life; as things become more uncertain and scary while he is awake, his dreams grow more intense and complicated. But, as with Conor, there is one constant in Steven's dreams, and that is the one creature that shows up in every dream.

What Steven first thought was an angel turns out to be a wasp, the queen wasp of the nest hanging outside his baby brother's window. The queen wasp is the central image (CI) of Steven's dreams because she is the one recurring constant and he remembers her when he is awake. She is also there as a result of Steven's repressed wish as she states that she has "come to help" (Oppel 20), so she symbolizes the hope he has for his brother to be saved. More details of the queen wasp will be presented in the next chapter, but for this chapter she is important because she is the CI of the dreams and thus represents Steven's underlying emotion, which is guilt. This is however not evident at first, because the queen wasp then seems to be there to fulfill a wish that Steven consciously recognizes and accepts, and he asks her "how are you going to fix the baby?" (Oppel 49). This is only part of his full wish, which is revealed by the queen wasp as she tells Steven how she will help the baby: she and her worker wasps are building a new baby inside their nest, and they will give Steven's family the new baby in change for the original one. This repressed wish stems from wanting things to "go back to the way it was" (Oppel 132) when his family was happy instead of sad and confused, and Steven's guilt multiplies as he struggles with ambivalent feelings toward the queen wasp's plans. On the one hand, Steven reacts with confusion and denial, and on the other hand, he continues to have this dream, showing that the repressed wish continues to exist. He tells the wasp queen that he "didn't ask for this" (Oppel 78), and this proves how unconscious his wish truly is. It is not until Steven is presented with a choice that he is able to acknowledge his wish. The queen wasp needs his help to switch the babies, and she plays on Steven's desires to end "suffering and heartbreak" and making his "mother and father happy", to "making a better life for everyone" (Oppel 132). Here, the queen wasp reveals the motivation behind Steven's repressed wish, and although he resists it because he knows that this is wrong (hence the guilt he is experiencing), he agrees to help her. By saying yes, Steven indirectly admits to his repressed wish, and this causes an emotional reaction in him. In his dream he seems relieved, but when he wakes up and his consciousness catches up, he feels "sick in [his] stomach" because he has "done something terrible" (Oppel 133). This intensifies Steven's guilt, which in turn intensify his dreams, and his dreams turn into nightmares.

Steven finds solace and happiness in his dreams at first, and he refers to it as his "angel dream" that feels "good to be inside" (Oppel 6; 46), but when the queen wasp tells him the real plan of swapping the babies instead of simply fixing his baby brother—i.e., his repressed wish is revealed and triggers increased feelings of guilt—the dreams darken. Again, this harkens back to the emphasis dream and nightmare theories put on the emotional state of the dreamer, which is exemplified by Steven's reaction to the revelation of his repressed wish. Before this, the aura of the dream is tranquil with brightness and a "thrum of music" (Oppel 65), and it appears to take place within a deep cave which creates strong associations to a womb with its "curved walls […] all around", and how the cave "began to contract into a circle of bright light" (Oppel 46, 50). With the new baby growing inside the cave, the allusion of a womb could be used by the author to imply a safe space, similar to the notion of dreams being a safe space. This cave turns out to be a wasp nest, and the nest is a metaphor for a womb and safe space also when Steven is awake, as his technique to fall asleep requires him to pull the covers over his head to create his own little nest, and he makes this comparison when he is inside the dream nest that it is "like being wrapped up in bed with a duvet pulled over my head" (Oppel 216), i.e., he feels safe. However, this can also be associated with confinement, which is what the nest/womb turns into as Steven's underlying emotion intensifies and his dreams change, as well as the fact that both prison and nests have cells. This is shown when the nest grows darker and the walls "looked thicker, more fibrous" (Oppel 73), as well as the wasp queen sealing Steven into a cell within the nest in his final dream.

At this point, the dreams have turned into nightmares, and this change is first seen when the repressed wish is uncovered and Steven wakes up "with [his] heart racing" and he thinks that he might throw up (Oppel 70). Such a strong bodily reaction is a telltale sign of a nightmare, and it is a big contrast from the happiness and hope Steven felt when waking up from the dreams before this turning point. Hereon out, Steven expresses reluctance instead of eagerness towards the dreams, saying he does not "want to dream about them again" (Oppel 73; 111), as well as trying to make himself wake up once he is back inside the dream nest. The dreams become more threatening when Steven changes his mind about helping the queen wasp swap the babies. Now the queen wasp shows a more animalistic side by showing her poisonous stinger, and Steven is attacked by the wasps when he protects his baby brother from them. This is a metaphor for the internal battle happening within Steven, where an unresolved wish must compete with a change of heart, which also can be an example of Steven maturing and exemplifies the view of children's dreams' ability to "reflect cognitive and psychosocial development" (Siegel 2005: 153).

In contrast to *A Monster Calls*, it is a nightmare that helps Steven defeat his dreams. Steven has a lot of nightmares and he gets scared at night, which is another example of how the dreamer's underlying emotion can influence dreams. Since Steven is scared at night, he already finds himself in the emotional state that defines most nightmares, namely fear, thus, according to nightmare theory, it makes sense that he experiences many nightmares when looking at this self-fulfilling circle. However, one of the nightmares is worse than the others in the sense that Steven remembers it more vividly and it is recurrent, signifying that it bears a deeper meaning. At first, the reader only learns a glimpse of this nightmare: "there's someone or something standing at the foot of my bed, [...] my blankets are yanked off my body [...] and I know I am totally exposed to whatever is standing there" (Oppel 17).

Later, when Steven is sent to talk to his therapist, he is asked if he remembers this one particular nightmare, to which Steven thinks "Of course I remember it", to then explain what he remembers: "There's something standing at the foot of the bed, just watching me. And sometimes they pull the covers off me" and "A dark shape assembled itself at the foot of my bed, and just stood there, watching me" (Oppel 105, 20). This dark shape is evidently the CI of the nightmare since Steven remembers it clearly enough to describe and it is an explanatory metaphor for his fear. As was established in chapter one, Steven is anxious and scared of a lot of things, and following the logic of nightmare theory, this could lead to possibly experiencing more nightmares as "most nightmares are caused by and reflect emotional conflicts that take place during the day" (Leung & Robson 1993: 234). This nightmare has tormented Steven for years, but it evolves into something more multifarious when his dreams about the queen wasp begin. This nightmare turns into a great literary example of how "nightmares may serve as an emotional release" (Leung & Robson 234), because it is this shadow creature at the foot of his bed who assists Steven in defeating the queen wasp.

The nightmare is another instance of how dreams can foreshadow, prepare, warn, etc. about future events, and this is shown by the blanket always being yanked off of Steven: by removing Steven's blanket nest, the nightmare tries to protect Steven from the dream nest. It becomes clear that the queen wasp knows about this, as she tells Steven that this dark shape is "a liar" and "your nightmare" (Oppel 2015: 166), and this is another conflict happening within Steven where the repressed wish in his dreams compete with what can be thought of as the *censor*. The censor is opposed to the fulfillment of repressed wishes, and it distorts the dream "*in order to prevent the development of fear or other forms of disagreeable emotion*" (Freud 1913: 226, italics in original). The dark shape is identified as Mr. Nobody, and it is Mr.

Nobody who pulls Steven out from the cell the queen wasp has sealed him inside. Here we see the dream and the nightmare blending, just as in *A Monster Calls*.

Finally, to rid himself off the repressed wish, Steven and Mr. Nobody/the censor overpower the queen wasp and Steven kills her, symbolizing the acceptance of his baby brother and thus no longer needing or wanting to fix him. Steven understands the connection between his dreams and nightmare when he wakes up, that "Mr. Nobody c[a]me to warn me" (Oppel 2015: 230). The ending of Steven's final dream/nightmare is similar to Conor's in that it symbolizes a rebirth, but in Steven's case it is more literal since he falls alongside the new baby "toward the dilating hole in the nest and into the light" (Oppel 235). Thus, it fulfills the role of both dream and nightmare by "processing and treating mental stimuli that are disturbing for the dreamer" (Colace 2013: 161) and serving as an emotional release, as well as providing another example of how children's fiction and dream theory can work together.

To round up this analysis, I want to offer one last reason of how *The Nest* is a good example of children's literature that combines fiction and theory. By including scenes with a therapist, the reader is presented with a professional viewpoint on everything Steven is experiencing. Although Oppel is not a professional therapist and it is unclear whether he had a professional consult on this representation, I do not want to judge the accuracy or therapeutic value of Oppel's portrayal of Steven's therapy session. Nevertheless, Oppel's decision to include an element of therapy highlights how dreams, nightmares, and crafted narratives can be combined with therapy or help facilitate conversations around challenging topics for children.

Steven is sent to his therapist, Dr. Brown, after telling his parents about his dreams about the queen wasp. In accordance with the dream theory in this chapter, Dr. Brown alludes to the connection between daytime experiences and dreams when he tells Steven that he cannot control his dreams, and since there is "a lot going on in your life right now" and therefore Steven will likely "have some more dreams about them [the wasps], the nest, and the baby" (Oppel 111-112). The therapist also states that "there are many different theories about dreams" and that dreams can "feel like very powerful experiences" (Oppel 109), which are views that are supported in the field of dream research and reflected in the frequency of dreams utilized as a literary devise. Dr. Brown does not seem to represent a classical psychoanalyst, however, as he does not try to analyze Steven's unconsciousness based on his dreams. Instead, Dr. Brown reminds Steven that dreams "have no real power" and "what happens in a dream stays inside a dream" (Oppel 109-110). This might be the best advice for an anxious kid like Steven, but it is also an example of how adults often dismiss dreams as

being 'just a dream', thereby ignoring or downplaying dreams as a potential symptom of deep-rooted struggles such as childhood grief and/or trauma. But with the knowledge that "many psychoanalysts take no special interest in dreams" today (Budd 2004: 254), Dr. Brown can serve as a relevant example of contemporary therapists. Moreover, in the context of the novel, Oppel signalizes the thematic significance of the dreams through how much space is devoted to them and through Steven's reactions to them.

Chapter conclusion

As this chapter uncovers with the assistance of theoretical and fictional examples, the connection between emotions and dreams is unmistakable. The novels offer fictional portrayals of a symptom that often goes unnoticed, and having such examples to point to can be effective when trying to open the conversation and discussion of challenging themes, such as grief and trauma. The heightened emotions of dreams and nightmares, and the blurred lines between fiction and reality, make dreams and nightmares a useful tool for authors to deal with difficult, complex topics in a way kids can understand and feel safe discussing with peers, guardians, teachers, and so on.

As mentioned, there is not a lot of theory on dreams in literature, and especially not in children's literature, and I hope this analysis reveals the potential for applying updated dream theory on children's fiction similar to what one would do when analyzing adult literature. Although this chapter analyzes the dreams of *fictional* characters and the findings are in no way universal, the analysis shares how *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* provide many examples of how literature and dream theory can work together. Further, to build upon my suggestion of the CI serving as a potential fast lane to uncover fictional characters' motivations, it can certainly be imagined that "a nightmare near the beginning of the work serves […] a similar purpose of pointing immediately to the core issues" (White-Lewis 1993: 61).

The monsters of the protagonists' dreams have been introduced in this chapter, but the next chapter will analyze the monsters' role and function in the novels. I argue that, because of the lack of support they receive from their caregivers, it is the monsters who take on the role of caregivers and this ultimately starts the child protagonists' road to healing and acceptance.

Chapter 3: Monster Therapy, or the Paradox of Horror

Introduction

The long tradition of monsters reveals that we have always needed monsters in our lives. Always in our periphery, hovering by the borders between the known and the unknown, taunting with their rich symbolism of forbidden desires, monsters have provided us with a mirror of truth since the dawn of humanity. An actor with great range, the monster has undertaken many roles and functions throughout history, and what connects all of them is the monster's ability to symbolize what is outside human control, whether that be urges, emotions, fears, etc. On the surface, then, a monster will be frightening because it represents something uncontrollable, something chaotic and unspeakable.

Furthermore, to place a monster within children's literature, combining the monster with the perceived innocence of childhood, has met much condemnation from critics and lay alike. As briefly discussed in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the opposition against monsters in literature for children is mostly based on the urge to protect children so that they can maintain their innocence. But at what point does the need for preparation succumb at the expense of protection? Where should this line be drawn? There is no agreement on this between adults, but frightening books for children have "been holding center court for the last few decades in American publishing houses" (McCort 2016: 9) and are clearly popular among children despite what adults may think. Therefore, based on the very real attraction toward the frightening (which only seems to be on the incline these days in the form of horror movies and scary books for children and adults alike), it proves necessary to acquire knowledge about the monster and the horror genre, specifically targeted toward children's literature, in order to better understand how they remain popular and paradoxically attractive.

This chapter argues that the monster has potential for being a helpful and valuable creature in children's literature and that it should not automatically be feared with no regard to its function. By analyzing the monsters in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest*, I will present examples of how the monsters help the child protagonists heal from their childhood grief and emotional neglect through their dreams. I argue that the monsters take on the role of the caretakers because, as explored in chapter one, the child protagonists' caregivers do not keep their children informed or supported enough to feel safe and protected. Thus, as a wish-fulfillment

to cope with the trauma in their lives, the child protagonists meet the monsters in their dreams and start a journey toward acceptance and healing, whether they consciously want to or not. I will first present theories on monsters in order to better understand their function in society and literature, as well as sharing the definitions I will follow when analyzing what makes the monsters monsters in the novels. I also present a theory based on C. G. Jung's collective unconscious which is inspired by his assumption of children being closer to the primitive mind. As a sidenote, I must say that although I choose to foreground the potential benefits of monsters and horror, this does not mean that I view them as any less scary or that I think all children must read scary books. While I do underline monsters' positive qualities in this chapter, I will also discuss what makes the monster frightening and why it is a monster. Because no matter how beneficial or entertaining it might be, it is still a monster, with everything that entails, and the paradox of this will be explained with the help of the monster theories below.

What is a monster?

Before any analysis can start, it is necessary to define what a monster is. According to scholars within fields such as history, language, and anthropology, monsters arose alongside human civilization, and the term has had and still has multiple meanings across the globe (Gilmore 2003: 5). A monster can be used to describe a terrible human being, it can be something supernatural, it can be something grotesque-looking, and so on. "Monster" stems from the Latin *monstrare* (to show) and *monstrum*, which in turn derives from the root *monere* (to warn) (Asma 2009: 13). Thus, a monster is an omen, a warning, a lesson, and it usually de*monstra*tes the things we least want to acknowledge. But what makes a monster a monster? Are there any common denominators or shared characteristics? A monster is perhaps as elusive and flighty to define as the unknown itself. It is an ancient being, the symbolization and manifestation of any uncomfortable emotion, most often fear, but the monster is also something terrifyingly real and relentless. In several cultures, the monster continues to plays an integral part as something tangible and real, so the fact that I am writing from a Western standpoint must be taken into account since the view on monsters differs from culture to culture. For example, in the West, monsters are often taken for granted because of their prevalent presence in popular culture, and by being so acclimated to monstrous presence, the psychological meaning behind monsters' appeal is rarely taken into consideration (Gilmore 2003: 4). However, this chapter will provide insight into the psychological meaning and multilayered function of monsters. Although the monster has become more of an actor in

fictional works in the Western world today and most people here see the monster as something imaginary, there still exists a wide-held belief in monsters in the shape of demons and devils (Asma 2009: 13). To arrive at my definition of a monster for this chapter, I will present three different theories of what a monster is from which I take inspiration.

Within monster theory, most have heard of Professor Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's list of monstrous qualities presented in his trailblazing chapter in *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, where he shares seven theses that he claims define a monster. He recognizes the difficulty of defining a monster because it "refuses easy categorization", and the whole point of monster is exactly that; they are supposed to be disturbing, fluid bodies resisting any attempt to "include them in any systematic structuration" (Cohen 1996: 6). This refusal to be defined is therefore part of the definition. In more concrete terms, a monster is "always a displacement", it "notoriously appears at times of crisis", and it is through the body of the monster that "fantasies of aggression, domination, and inversion" can be safely expressed in a delimited, liminal space (Cohen 4; 6; 17).

As a cultural, societal monster, the monster can be said to inhabit two main roles: On the one hand, it serves as a reminder to question the status quo because, as a being created from the system's shortcomings and fears, it "reveals the truth of the system, its relativity, its fragility, and its mortality" and "offers a base for critique" (Cohen 12; 20), and on the other hand, stationed "at the limits of knowing", the monster is a warning against "exploration of its uncertain demesnes" (Cohen 12). By stepping outside the borders of controlled society and into the hazy land of monsters, one is at great risk of being attacked by monsters or to "become monstrous oneself" (Cohen 12). Yet, paradoxically, this is part of what makes the monster and the monstrous appealing, and it is this "simultaneous repulsion and attraction" that greatly accounts for monsters' "continued cultural popularity" (Cohen 17). The monster offers a "temporary egress from constraint" (Cohen 17), and it is this freedom, although limited, that proves tempting to many. But this escapist delight gives way to horror when "the monster threatens to overstep these boundaries" (Cohen 17), so, in a way, it is okay for society to explore the monstrous, but not for the monstrous to explore society. In an attempt to control the monster that finds a way across these borders, society (and literature) have created the narrative of the scapegoated monster being ritually destroyed, symbolizing a purge for the community "by eliminating its sins" (Cohen 18).

Based on this, and on the monster's ability to pictorially convey the fragility of society and humanity, the monster can be used in children's literature as an opening into the

discussion of themes that might otherwise be challenging to talk about. The themes in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest*, such childhood grief, neglect, death, and monsters in general, are examples of themes typically considered taboo for children, but by portraying them the books create an opening as well as literary samples that can be employed in an attempt to spur a conversation and education around such themes.

Similar to Cohen, philosopher and professor Nöel Carroll discusses the paradox of horror and monsters where he offers his theory of *art-horror* in an attempt to explain society's ancient attraction to the monstrous. He argues that the name of the genre is exactly what it is designed to produce, namely the emotion of horror, or, as Carroll terms it, art-horror. This emotion is not thought of as being of a dispositional emotional state, but rather an "occurrent emotional state, like a flash of anger" (Carroll 1990: 24). The art-horror theory is "entity-based", in that it refers to an entity, a monster, as the "particular object of the emotion of art-horror" (Carroll 41). Thus, to Carroll, horror stories are "marked by the presence of monsters" (15), but this does not mean that all stories containing monsters are of the horror genre. To be both, the emotion of art-horror must be present. By focusing on the emotion behind horror and monsters, Carroll takes a different approach to define these terms than those of the other theories presented. Both the emotions of the characters and the emotions of the audience are taken into account, where the emotional reactions of the characters "provide a set of instructions or, rather, examples about the way in which the audience is to respond to the monsters in the fiction" (Carroll 17). Ideally, these emotive responses should run parallel to each other, and this mirroring-effect is "a key feature of the horror genre" (Carroll 18).

To sharpen this definition, Carroll explores the typical emotional features attributed to characters in horror fiction by authors and directors (Carroll 19). Fear is of course the most obvious emotion, but this is only the surface. Below fear there is a mixture of threat "compounded with revulsion, nausea, and disgust", which corresponds well with horror stories' tendency of describing monsters in terms of "filth, decay, deterioration, slime, and so on" (Carroll 22). These are however not the only characteristics that make a monster, and Carroll goes on to underline the importance of monsters as threatening and dangerous, something he thinks is "incontestable" (Carroll 43). With this level of emphasis, the ability to be threatening and dangerous can be understood as the monster's defining quality, whether they are threatening "psychologically, morally, or socially", but it is "sufficient that the monster be physically dangerous", and this can be "satisfied simply by making the monster lethal" (Carroll 43). The monster can also trigger "enduring infantile fears, such as those of

being eaten or dismembered" (Carroll 43). The fear of being eaten is heavily portrayed through the monsters in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest*, which will be shown in the analysis. Carroll defines a monster as "any being not believed to exist now according to contemporary science", and that they are native to "places outside of and/or unknown to the human world", or they come from "marginal, hidden, or abandoned sites" such as graveyards, sewers, abandoned houses, old castles, etc. (Carroll 27; 35). Carroll offers more categories of how to define a monster, such as "categorical incompleteness"; "*fusion*" i.e., transgressing "categorical distinctions such as inside/outside, living/dead, insect/human […]"; "magnification", typically of beings already considered impure or disgusting because "augmenting their scale increases their physical dangerousness", and also by "*massing*" such creatures to create a similar effect (Carroll 33; 43; 49; 50, italics in original). As will be shown in the analysis, the monsters featured in the novels fit into several of these categories, which in turn support the construction of their monstrosity.

However, the question of why and how horror can be attractive remains unanswered, and Carroll dedicates chapter four to answer this paradox. Although not directly important for my analysis of the novels, I find it necessary to explain this so people, especially the opponents of monsters and horror, can attempt to understand the attractive side of it, because, as these theories exemplify, there *is* one. Works of horror are both attractive and repulsive, and this "is essential to an understanding of the genre" (Carroll 160). One of the most accepted presumptions of the attraction to horror is that it allows us to be in an invigorating emotional state without having to pay the price of said state, i.e., the emotion of fear is usually inspired by danger, and by consuming works of horror we can experience the emotion without having to face any real danger. Another possible explanation can be found in psychoanalysis, where the monster "yields pleasure through manifesting what is repressed", thus ending with "a sense of liberation" (Carroll 174). He links this to nightmares and wish-fulfillment, in that the products of the dreamwork "enunciate both a wish and its inhibition", in turn rendering the products "simultaneously attractive and repellent" (Carroll 169). In this way, horror, monsters, and wish-fulfillment achieve comparable outcomes. But what seems to make horror so attractive, especially in turbulent times, is its repertory of symbolism and how its iconography can be deployed to "articulate the widespread anxiety of times of stress" (Carroll 214).

According to Professor David Gilmore, monsters across time and location share certain attributes that constitute their monstrosity. Similar to Carroll, Gilmore points to qualities such as violence, aggression, man-eating, gigantic, atavistic, and powerful (2003: ix). Interestingly,

Gilmore devotes more attention to monsters being man-eaters than their ability to threaten, claiming that "eating human beings" is a "critical aspect of monsterhood" (7). His definition of monsters is a bit vaguer than Carroll's, where "monsters, are imaginary, not real, embodiments of terror" (Gilmore 6). This definition is, in my opinion, vague because it demands supplementary definitions of terms such as "terror" and "real"; just because something is imaginary, can it not be felt as real? How do we tell real from imaginary based on objective opinion? Yet, for my analysis, the idea of monsters being "imaginary" is fitting since the monsters are works of fiction and within the text, they visit the child protagonists in their dreams, i.e., a state where imagination is at play.

Gilmore offers a more historical approach to monster theory where he presents the many various roles the monster has played at different times and in different cultures. Since the beginning of recorded time, monsters "have been part of a semiotic culture of divination, metaphors, messages, indications of deeper meaning or inspiration" (Gilmore 9). Still to this day, the monster has the ability to act as "portents of something momentous, carrying profound, even spiritual meaning beyond just frightfulness" (Gilmore 10). In this way, the monster has always signified something bigger than itself, something unnamable, frightening, tabooed, unknown. Always a displacement, as Cohen said. But the other side of monster theory shows the unwillingness to accept the monstrous. Because, at the end of the day (or of the story), tradition shows that the monster must be defeated. Similar to what Carroll discussed around the conventions of the horror genre, stories of monsters usually end in the same manner: the hero wins and the monster dies. Monsters "provide a convenient pictorial metaphor for human qualities that have to be repudiated, externalized, and defeated" (Gilmore 4), and, as also mentioned by Cohen, the victory over the monster (and what it symbolized) results in equilibrium. By this logic, monsters are needed to maintain society, because "heroes make civilization by the example of monster-taming" (Gilmore 27). *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* are stories that also follow this process, and the monsters are defeated by the end, in one way or another. This tradition is perhaps even more important to upkeep in regard to children's literature, as genre conventions and a set of rules can make horror fiction and monsters less scary because one knows what to expect, and no matter how long or frightful the story is, one can trust that the monster will lose.

Inspired by these monster theories, I will apply a combination of them in my literary analysis. Also here, as in chapter two, emotions are profoundly featured. This follows the same logic of using emotions to differentiate between dreams and nightmares, and here using emotions to

identify monsters. Because, even as they are frequently referenced to as monsters by the narrative, the child protagonists' do not always show the expected emotions of fear, disgust, or revulsion. I will therefore pay attention to how the narrative makes the monster into a monster versus how and when the monsters become monsters in a more direct manner to the child protagonists. This approach can provide helpful to most children's literature, especially horror fiction, because, following Carroll's theory of the characters' emotional reactions acting as guides to the audience's emotions, noticing and understanding a character's emotional reaction (or lack thereof) can change our view on the story or an element in the story, such as a monster. This is yet another reason why *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* can act as examples of fiction where monsters are a big part of the books, but in a way that portrays the much-debated paradox of monsters somehow being both frightening and attractive. As I argue, the monsters *help* the child protagonists, but this does not mean that they are any less of a monster. Their monstrous qualities are in accordance with most of the characteristics listed above, such as being threatening, lethal, man-eating, gigantic, powerful, and so on, and examples of all will be in the analysis.

One thing that repeats in all the monster theories mentioned, is the notion of the universality of monsters and how this points toward some deep human thread, some shared memories of "superseded, archaic times" (Gilmore 2003: 73). The monster functions as dialectical Other, an "incorporation of the Outside, the Beyond" but which originates "Within" (Cohen 1996: 7). With its immense power of symbolism, the monster is an attestation to shared fantasies and fears across time and cultures. This concept opens up the possibility to connect the monstrous with the collective unconscious to further expand upon the monsters in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* functioning as helpers, as guides, as caregivers, because, as we shall see, the archetypes of the collective unconscious often show up in times of need.

The archaic child and the collective unconscious

Carl Jung differentiates between "fantasies (including dreams) of a personal character" and "fantasies (including dreams) of an impersonal character", and where the former can be explained by personal experiences, the latter cannot be reduced to individual experiences (Jung 1981: 119, para. 262). These impersonal fantasies are thought to be inherited and part of a collective element of the human psyche, a sort of "collective psychic substratum" (119, para. 262). It is this shared psychic system, which is "collective, universal, and impersonal" and "identical in all individuals" (43, para. 90), that Jung defines as the collective unconscious. He

compares this to other impersonal and universally distributed hereditary factors such as instincts, and that the collective unconscious is another pattern of instinctual behavior: "The hypothesis of the collective unconscious is, therefore, no more daring than to assume there are instincts" (Jung: 44, para. 92). To further verify his theory, Jung refers to the "almost universal parallelism between mythological motifs" (55, para. 118), i.e., primordial images which he names archetypes. In relation to the collective unconscious, archetypes are universal symbols and patterns that occur on the ethnological level as myths, religions, and fairy tales across different times and cultures. The idea is that these archetypes represent fundamental human experiences and emotions that essentially are unconscious content which is "altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived" (Jung 16, para. 6). Sounds similar to the concept of monsters, does it not?

A consistent aspect of the collective unconscious that Jung continues to underline, is the universal inborn quality of it all. The child is not born with a tabula rasa psyche, instead, it is born with "inherited instincts and preformed patterns" (1981: 60, para. 136). Jung and Freud, and many of their contemporaries, viewed children as being closer to the primitive mind, and, while being of contrasting views on much else, they both "saw the child as an analogue to the primitive man" (Kidd 2011: 10). Following this theory, this apparently innate connection to the primitive would in turn cause children to be more susceptible to symbolic thought and the collective unconscious. With this in mind, there seems to be potential for the collective unconscious, i.e., archetypes, to show up in times of need, and they are often triggered by emotional events. It is when one understands that a problem cannot be solved by only using one's own resources that can result in "a compensatory reaction from the collective unconscious", and during these times Jung advices to pay more attention to "the dreams that visit you at such moments" (1981: 27, para. 44), because the main source for the production of archetypes is dreams (1981: 47, para. 100). They are also situational, in that an archetype "becomes activated […] like an instinctual drive" when a situation corresponds to a given archetype (1981: 47, para. 99). These archetypes are often primordial, i.e., "universal images that have existed since the remotest times" (Jung 1981: 16, para. 5), and they first and foremost express themselves in metaphors (1981: 121, para. 267). According to the monster theory discussed above, monsters can easily fit into this description of the archetypes.

The archetypes appear in dreams as psychic forces that are there for protection and salvation (1981: 120, para. 266). This also corresponds to much of the dream theory in chapter two that hypothesize about the healing-properties of dreams, as well as when Jung

claims to have found that the "existence of unrealized, unconscious fantasies increases the frequency and intensity of dreams", where "dreams often contain fantasies which "want" to become conscious" (1981: 48, para. 101). Literary examples of this can be found in the previous chapter, but the point of including this information here is that dreams are often the vehicle that bring the archetypes forth, and my argument is that a monster can act as such an archetype based on the fact that they often show up in times of need/times of crisis, they are ancient and feature in many myths, they carry with them a deeper meaning and cause, and they are expressed through metaphors. Similar to dreams and monsters, there are certain characteristics that repeat themselves frequently in the collective unconscious, which Jung refers to as "motif" to "designate these repetitions" (1981: 138, para. 309). These can be situations or figures, where the figures are archetypes, and some of the most repetitive archetypes are, according to Jung, these: the shadow, the wise old man, the child, the mother, the maiden, and the anima/animus (1981: 139, para. 309). The content of these could create an entire thesis by itself, but since I must comply to my thesis argument and its constrictions, I will focus on the archetypes that are most fitting for the monsters in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest*, which, in my opinion, are *the wise old man* and *the mother*. Examples of why and how will be in the upcoming analysis.

This is a shortened version of the archetypes and the collective unconscious, but my argument is inspired by Jung's belief that children are closer to the primitive and archaic. If we are indeed born with these instincts, this "psychic organ present in all of us" (Jung1981: 123, para. 271), then it would make sense that the younger we are, the more open we are to the archetypes because we have yet to develop the defense mechanisms that keep them at bay most of the time. Although Jung's concept of the collective unconscious involves many other intricate ideas, I have presented what I personally think are the main characteristics of the collective unconscious, and the focus of my analysis builds on the potential connection between viewing the child as closer to the primal mind and how this may mean the child can access the collective unconscious more easily, or vice versa.

In this vein, I argue that the monsters in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* can be understood as archetypes brought forth by the intrinsic collective unconscious to help the child protagonists deal with new and overwhelming emotions such as grief, fear, anxiety, helplessness, etc. The monsters additionally make the child protagonists face and accept their new reality by putting events, feelings, and thoughts into words. As the protagonists' life situations worsens, the archetypes show up as monsters to simultaneously act as projections of

the things that cannot be named (and will not), and also as catalysts to make the protagonists do just that: name their fears.

The idea that words have power is an old belief and the whole concept of most therapy, especially psychoanalysis, which is known as 'the talking cure'. Naming something automatically makes you gain power over the unnamed; "[…] as soon as a monster is named it is tamed, and it is no longer terrifying" (Tesar & Koro-Ljungberg 2015: 696). With the help of the collective unconscious in the form of monsters, the protagonists are made to name in order to tame by speaking the unspeakable, which are their repressed wishes from their wish-fulfillments discussed in the previous chapter. Thus, I argue that the monsters in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* do not only provide examples of complex archetypes in the shape of monsters, but also of the collective unconscious at work.

Analysis

A Monster Calls and *The Nest* share many similarities when it comes to the monsters presented. Both monsters first show up in the child protagonists' dreams and they begin the interaction with the child protagonists by offering them a deal. If they agree to this deal, their lives will improve, but both child protagonists are initially hesitant to accept this bribe from their monsters. It is made obvious from the first meeting between monsters and protagonists that the monsters are big, that they are dangerous and powerful, which will be shown in more detail in the following analysis. The point here is that both monsters therefore fit into some of the aforementioned qualities posed by several esteemed monster theorists and this in turn reinforces their perceived monstrosity.

Through the progression of the books, it becomes apparent that the monsters are the only ones the child protagonists dare to fully confide in, which is a direct result of how the monsters force the truth out of the child protagonists by implementing threats and promises both, illustrating the inherent monstrous ability to both terrify and attract. In my analysis I therefore want to focus on the inclusion of literary examples from the novels that reflect this paradox in a way to foreground the monster's intrinsic complexity.

A Monster Calls

> *You still do not know why you called me, do you?* the monster asked. *You still do not know why I have come walking. It is not as if I do this every day, Conor O'Malley.*

> “I didn’t call you,” Conor said. “Unless it was in a dream or something. And even if I did, it was obviously for my mum.”
> *Was it?*
>
> (Ness, Patrick. *A Monster Calls*, 2011, p. 166, italics in original)

The presence of a monster in this novel is evident by simply reading its title. While obvious on the surface, the title proves to be far more complicated as it is a recurrent discussion between the monster and Conor of who called who, as the quote above demonstrates. The monster insists that it was Conor who called for it to come, but Conor disagrees. "Call" can mean different things, such as calling in on someone to check on them, calling as in trying to capture someone's attention, the calling of an animal, a crying out, making a request or a demand, and so on. The first time Conor meets the monster, he hears it calling his name, which immediately underscores the title. In this way, they are calling each other, and it ends with Conor accepting that he did in fact call on the monster because he "had needed it" (Ness 2011: 235).

But the question of who is the monster that called also arises as the novel progresses and the lines between the human world and the monstrous are blurred, leading to Conor taking on some monstrous qualities himself. As Cohen explained earlier, one risks becoming "monstrous oneself" (1996: 12) if overstepping the borders that separate controlled society and the world of monsters, and this happens as a form of dissociation for Conor. For example, this happens when Conor confronts Harry, his bully, at school. As Conor's anger intensifies, he can feel "the monster standing there" (Ness 2011: 176), and he imagines that the "nervous murmurs" and the "strange anticipation in the air" is because of "the huge monster now in their midst" (Ness 176). The monster sends Harry flying across the floor with its "huge, monstrous hand" (Ness 177), which in turn makes Harry's friends look to Conor and their "faces changed as they saw him" (Ness 177), as well as running away when Conor steps closer to them, which indicates that his newfound monstrosity scares them away since they are not shown to be afraid of him anywhere else in the book. Harry ends up being sent to the hospital with a broken arm and nose, and the Headmistress is confused as to "how one boy could have caused so much damage by himself" (Ness 181), clearly removing any monster from the equation. Conor even says to her that the monster did it and that he "didn't even touch Harry", and the rebuttal is that the "entire dining hall saw you hitting Harry […]" (Ness 184). Conor admits to himself that he "had felt what the monster was doing to Harry, *felt* it in

his own hands" (Ness 181, italics in original), and he can feel that his hands are sore, physical evidence that the actions were performed by him.

A comparable incident takes place when Conor and the monster destroy his grandmother's sitting room, where the monster and Conor roars to each other while pounding at the walls in an act of mirroring behavior. Upon waking from his fantasy/dissociation, however, Conor realizes that the sitting room is completely wrecked and that he is all by himself, and he reacts by thinking there "was no *way* he could have done all this himself" (Ness 140, italics in original). These examples show how the monster gives Conor opportunities to express his suppressed anger, as well as functioning as an alter ego that "awakens one to the pleasures of the body, to the simple and fleeting joys of being frightened, or frightening […]" (Cohen 1996: 17). This is further exemplified by Conor's own emotions as he destroys the sitting room, where he feels that "this time *he* was the one in control, this time *he* was the nightmare" (Ness 121, italics in original), showing his desire to be frightening like his nightmare, which was discussed in detail in chapter two, and the monster provides him "safe expression in a clearly delimited and permanently liminal space" (Cohen 1996: 17). This helps to "release repression, if only momentarily" (Carroll 1990: 176). 'Safe', however, is relative, because beating someone up or destroying a room would not be considered safe, but the safety here is in relation to the limitation of expression, where the expression begins and ends with the monster's presence. When the monster disappears, Conor wakes up to reality and the borders have thus been reinstated.

From the start, the monster is transparent about what it wants from Conor: it wants the truth. The deal is that the monster will first tell Conor three stories from when it has visited the human world before, and in return, Conor will tell a fourth story which will contain his innermost truth, the one thing he refuses to admit to anyone, even to himself. This immediately stirs resistance in Conor, who asks what will happen if he refuses, to which the monster replies "*I will eat you alive*" (Ness 2011: 53, italics in original). This is clearly a threat that coincides with the primal fear of being eaten, but it can also be a play on Conor's guilt and the well-known idiom of 'guilt will eat you alive'. At the end of their very first meeting, the monster's mouth roars open "to eat him alive" (Ness 23). This can be seen as the initial merging of the two. This is however a forced merging, as before this, the monster "smashed an arm through Conor's window, shattering glass […]" to grab Conor and clenches "so hard against Conor's ribs he could barely breathe" (Ness 22). What prompts the monster to

this outburst is the surprise of Conor's lack of fear, and in order to make him afraid, the monster does this, but to no avail. Conor claims that he has seen worse things, which is a nod toward the recurring nightmare analyzed in the previous chapter.

During their second meeting, the monster tells Conor to "*open up*", which on the surface level is an order to open the bedroom window, but in a deeper sense it is an invitation for Conor to open up and let the monster in, metaphorically and psychologically speaking (Ness 47, italics in original). The monster says, "*I want to talk to you*", to which Conor sarcastically replies "that's what monsters always want. To *talk*" (Ness 47, italics in original). Like a devoted psychoanalyst, perhaps one a bit too boundary-crossing like any monster, the monster will "*force [its] way in*" if Conor does not open up voluntarily (Ness 47, italics in original). Conor asks what the monster wants from him, but the monster claims that it is Conor who wants something from the monster. Even though Conor strongly disagrees with that statement, it shows that the monster is there for a reason unknown (repressed) to Conor. As the monster makes clear, it does not walk often and it only comes walking "*for matters of life and death*" (50, italics in original). In other words, the monster is there to help because Conor is going through a lifechanging situation, a situation of literal life and death. This is an example of something mentioned by the monster theory above, namely how the monster tends to appear "at times of crisis" (Cohen 1996: 4).

But what makes this monster a monster? Following the lead of the various monstrous qualities listed above by Carroll, Cohen, and Gilmore, the monster in *A Monster Calls* fits several of these. What makes this monster different than most, however, is the lack of reaction from the child protagonist. The first time Conor sees the monster, he "wasn't even frightened" and he actually feels "a growing disappointment" (Ness 2011: 21). Through the novel's narration, this strange creature is immediately categorized as a monster, with Conor saying that it "wasn't the monster he was expecting" (Ness 21). Nevertheless, the fact that the protagonist is shown to consider the monster to be a monster, in that specific word, helps build the understanding of what this creature is supposed to be and how it is constructed. But why does Conor think of this being as a monster when, in most cases, he does not seem afraid of it? The continuous emphasis on the monster's monstrous qualities through the narrative versus the child protagonist's lack of fear while facing this monster is a unique feature of *A Monster Calls*.

There are some instances where the monster manages to frighten Conor, such as when he steps "back at the monster's anger" (Ness 129), but for the most part he remains unfazed. The reason behind this, I think, is to highlight how frightening Conor's daily situation

(discussed in chapter one) is. He suffers from a recurrent nightmare where the contents are inspired by a repressed wish made during his daytime experiences which are uncertain at best. Not even a monster can compete with the fear Conor harbors around his mother's health, and his sorrow is so intense even the monster is taken aback: "Conor whirled round, and his face looked so furious, so pained, that the monster actually stood up straight, its huge, leafy eyebrows raising in surprise" (Ness 66). The fear Conor feels in his daily life is further emphasized when, after destroying her sitting room, his grandmother comes home and screams at what he has done, and Conor admits that he has "never been so frightened in all his life" (Ness 143). By describing Conor's reactions and emotions around his circumstances as frightened, while the monster's actions receive more lackluster responses, shows that Conor's real life is worse than any monster. This is also interesting when taking Carroll's theory of emotional reactions into account, and how the fictional characters' reaction to the monster act as an example of how the audience is to respond. Based on this theory, A Monster Calls would not qualify as a horror novel because 1) the child protagonist does not react to the monster how one is supposed to react to a monster, and 2) the monster then does not fulfill the criteria put on it by the horror genre, as it is the monster that is supposed to be the "particular object of the emotion of art-horror" (Carroll 1990: 41). But, on the other hand, the main emotion of art-horror, fear, is present through Conor's reactions to his daily life and his nightmare, which again invites the question of who or what the true monster is. The monster I focus on in this analysis is what I deem the 'main monster' based on its important role in the book, but this does not mean that other interpretations are impossible.

Why I categorize the monster in this analysis as the 'main monster' is based on the other criteria of what makes a monster, namely its physical attributes. It is through these descriptions that the narrative repeatedly highlights how monstrous the monster truly is, even if Conor is blinded by greater fears. First and foremost, the monster is always referred to with the pronoun 'it', which, according to Carroll, suggests that this creature is "not classifiable according to our standing categories" (1990: 33). This reluctance to be defined is, as discussed, part of the definition of a monster. Secondly, Conor witnesses the physical construction of the monster, which takes on the form of a yew tree, and this is an example of how the monster is the literal embodiment of Conor's repressed wish and how it finds its shape under Conor's gaze. Outside his window, he watches how the branches of the tree are shaped into "a great and terrible face", while the rest of the branches form humanoid features such as arms and legs, a spine and a torso, even leaves "weaving together to make a green,

furry skin that moved and breathed as if there were muscles and lungs underneath" (Ness 2011: 19-20). Here we see the concept of 'hybridization', where a monster often is a "grotesque hybrid" of human and animal features recombined (Gilmore 2003: 6), and 'fusion' that transgresses "categorical distinctions such as […] insect/human" (Caroll 1990: 43). Although Gilmore and Carroll refer to animal and human hybrids, any kind of hybrid would by definition fit into the category of 'hybridization' and 'fusion' by the act of mixing/transgressing different species, such as say, a tree and a human.

Another monstrous quality is the sheer size of the monster, which reminds the reader of how powerful and threatening it is, both qualities essential to monsters. This is emphasized a lot throughout the book with sentences such as "Already taller than Conor's window"; "[…] towering ten or fifteen metres above him"; "[…] a massive trunk of a chest, topped by a head and teeth that could chomp him down in one bite"; "[…] the monster spread its arms out wide, so wide they seemed to reach to opposite horizons, so wide they seemed to encompass the world"; "[…] its mouth opened impossibly wide, wide enough to eat the whole world"; "[…] it was bigger than his house and could swallow him in one bite"; "[…] its overwhelming *monstrousness*" (Ness 20; 48; 49; 53; 67; 77, italics in original), etc. This repetition of the monster's size solidifies its powerful and inhuman quality, and the focus on the monster's mouth and how it could easily eat Conor causes the monster to fit into yet another category, namely the category of being eaten. The threat of eating Conor alive is what repeats the most. Despite Conor's lack of fear, the existence of malice exists in the monster. This is shown through its violence, such as when the monster squeezes Conor "until he cried out", when it grabs Conor's ankles and "flipped him upside down", and how, during its second tale, the monster "threw the roof after them, barely missing them as they ran" (Ness 50; 73; 133). Likewise, the monster's "evil grin" is so frequently described that Conor learns to recognize it: "Its face had re-arranged itself into the expression Conor recognized as the evil grin" (Ness 123).

Additionally, the monster's location supports its monstrosity. The yew tree is said to rise "from the centre of the graveyard" when it awakens, and it hovers "over the graveyard like a sleeping giant" when it is inactive (Ness 18; 43). As stated by Carroll, monsters often come from "marginal, hidden, or abandoned sites", where his first example of such a site is the graveyard (Carroll 1990: 35). Another understanding of this is that it is the placement of the yew tree that causes the monster to claim the shape of a yew tree, because, as it resides in the

graveyard by a church, it is also a symbolic protector of the dead. This idea is reflected when Conor has learned the truth, that his mother is going to die, and he looks out at the church, noticing "the yew tree standing guard over its cemetery" (Ness 2011: 202). In the same vein, this can also be an example of how the monster embodies the fear of symbolically being eaten alive, by earth/nature (aka dying/being buried), which again shines a light on Conor's real fear: not his own death, but his mother's. These deeper meanings behind the monster's role in the story were in particular what inspired me to connect monsters with the collective unconscious.

With the yew tree monster being of natural origins, of nature itself, the concept of archetypes and something ancient pertains. By being of the Old World, nature, of earth itself, it shows the greatness and almost divine quality of this monster, and the line that separates monsters and gods has been difficult to draw with any certainty throughout history. Whereas the monsters were once thought of as omens from the gods, the arrival of Christianity turned monsters into pagan enemies whose purpose is to remind us of our sins (Gilmore 2003: 51, 52). However, based on the reactions monsters inspire, the "awe mixed with horror and terror", they create a "paradoxical closeness of the monstrous and the divine" (Gilmore 10). Monsters are what unite "the evil and the sublime in a single symbol" (Gilmore 10). In fact, monsters predate not only humans "but also the very gods" (Gilmore 47), which speaks to the timelessness of monsters and consequently their power. While the distinction between gods and monsters is a discussion too multifaceted to include here, my reasoning for mentioning this, although briefly, is to show how far back the monstrous really goes in hopes of better understanding my inclusion of the collective unconscious. Something that has existed for so long must in turn have had an effect on our inherited psychic substratum, especially when monsters are usually seen as threatening, thus it would make sense for the brain to register this threat in order to create crucial defense mechanisms and to maintain this as a sort of instinct.
Building upon this timelessness, the monster makes its own case as it has come "*walking out of time and earth itself*"; that it is "*the lungs that breathe the wind*" and "*the snake of the world devouring its tail*"; and how it has "*been alive as long as this land*" (Ness 83; 50; 65, italics in original), and so on. This antediluvian (prehistoric) background is further embellished when the monster presents itself with names. After Conor asks what the monster is, the monster reveals the true vastness of its being: "*I have had as many names as there are years to time itself!*"; "*I am Herne the Hunter! I am Cernunnos! I am the eternal Green Man!*" (Ness 50, italics in original). With reference to these names, the reader gains a sense of the

monster's dichotomy of being timeless while at the same time existing at all times. In other words, it exists outside of time, which is a prototypical human construct. British readers are likely to know one or more of these creatures, but for those who do not know, Herne the Hunter is a ghost associated with forests and parks in English folklore, Cernunnos is a Celtic deity worshipped as the lord of wild things, and the Green Man appears in several mythologies as a symbol of rebirth and resurrection. This prevalence of British-coded entities used to create the monster can also be a deliberate choice made to further contrast how Conor's father left him behind in England and moved to America. From this description, however, the monster does not seem like an ordinary monster, it is more a personification of nature itself, as well as of nature's ways.

Accompanied by the wisdom of nature, the yew tree monster has come to Conor for a reason. Like Jung's archetype of *the wise old man*, the yew tree monster appears to inspire profound reflection. In the collective unconscious, the wise old man appears "in a situation where insight, understanding, good advice, determination, planning, etc., are needed but cannot be mustered on one's own resources" (Jung 1981: 162, para. 400). By telling Conor three tales of when it walked the earth before, the monster often surprises Conor with the endings of these tales, and in turn lays ground for internal reflection. This in turn helps Conor realize that not all stories have happy endings, that there is not always a good guy because "*most people are somewhere inbetween*", that "*humans are complicated beasts*", and that what you think is not important; "*it is only important what you **do***" (Ness 84; 223; 225, emphasis in original). But, most importantly, the yew tree monster reveals that this is why it came to Conor, to "*tell you this so that you may heal*" (Ness 225, italics in original). Herein exists another reason as to why the monster took the shape of a yew tree seeing that it "*can take any form of any size*" (Ness 75, italics in original), and that is the properties of the yew tree. "*The yew tree is the most important of all the healing trees*" (Ness 128, italics in original), the monster tells Conor, and at one point, Conor's mother receives medication made from yew trees. Although this medicine does not save his mother, it is, as the previous analyses have revealed, Conor who needs healing. The monster claiming that "*the yew tree is a shape most comfortable*" (Ness 75, italics in original) implies that this monster enjoys the act of healing, that it has healed before and it will heal again. The monster's approach to healing is in line with the idea of the truth shall set you free, and it is when Conor finally reveals his repressed truth that he begins to heal.

In a period of loneliness and no one to talk to, the yew tree monster is there as the wise old man, to encourage insight and understanding of the situation, while also allowing Conor to express the emotions and thoughts he actively represses. Although the monster is not directly defeated in this novel, Conor overcomes what he fears the most and what has been his personal nightmare, in a sense overpowering the qualities most monsters inhabit.

The Nest

"The first time I saw them, I thought they were angels" is the first sentence in *The Nest* (Oppel 2015: 1). Immediately, this creates a stark contrast to the opening of *A Monster Calls*, where the monster is labelled as such straight away. The angels appear in Steven's dream and there is an otherworldly quality to them, with their "pale gossamer wings and the music that came off them, and the light that haloed them" (Oppel 1). All in all, this presents itself as a peaceful and ethereal experience for Steven, the child protagonist. Based on the general knowledge of angels, the beings in Steven's dream do not sound like potential monsters at all, do they? Instead, they sound like beings sent to help, like angels typically are, and this is what Steven thinks at first as well. From the very start, he feels that the creatures have been "watching and waiting, that they knew" him (Oppel 1). This is similar to Conor, in that neither of the protagonists are especially frightened by the unearthly creatures visiting them. When one of the 'angels' comes to talk to him, Steven does not "feel at all afraid of her" and thinks that she "seemed so easy and friendly" (Oppel 47-48). Conor was more reluctant toward his monster, but Steven immediately feels calm, which might signal that Steven is more open to help. In fact, the first thing the creature tells him is that they are there to help, which only strengthens Steven's affection for her. It is also worth noting that the creature is gendered as she/her from the start in comparison to Conor's "it", which in turn can help with the definition of her.

Although labeled as an angel at the start, Steven eventually understands that this creature actually is the queen wasp of a nest hanging outside his house. Thus, the monstrous characteristics of this creature are introduced, and more specifically with the tools of magnification and massing, where increasing the size and mass of "beings already typically adjudged impure or disgusting within the culture" intensifies "their physical dangerousness" (Carroll 1990: 49). As seen with many monsters, the quality of inhuman size is commonly used as a mechanism for them to appear more threatening. Wasps in their regular size already frighten many people, so increasing their size should by this logic also increase the fear one

feels. In The Nest, the wasps are larger than normal wasps, and the queen wasp herself is huge; "Her head alone seemed as big as me", says Steven (Oppel 2015: 21).

Previous to the revelation of the angel being a wasp, Steven has stated that he hates wasps and that he is deathly allergic to their stings, so at this point the reader already knows about Steven's underlying fear of them and how dangerous they can be for him. Steven learns from Vanessa, his babysitter who also is a biology student, that the wasps in this nest are not normal wasps. She has never seen anything like them, and even after she brings one wasp to her class for her professor to dissect, they are none the wiser, agreeing that this might be a new species or variation. This adds to the strangeness and plays into the concept of the unknown, which are areas where monsters thrive. Additionally, Steven compares the queen wasp to predators such as a lion, and comments that her mandibles are "[…] like pincers. They were sharp-edged" (Oppel 75). Again, this attention to the monster's mouth is linked to the primal fear of being eaten, and this is further developed when the queen wasp reveals what they will do to Steven's baby brother in return for the new baby: they will eat him. The threat of being eaten is not directly made toward Steven at first, but at the end of the book, after he is captured and the queen wasp seals him into a cell in the nest, there is a larva there moving closer to him, with "a big hole of a mouth, rimmed with barbs" and it bites down on Steven, "its mouth trying to fit itself around [his] skull" (Oppel 221, 222).

As the novel progresses, the plot turns darker and the threatening, i.e., monstrous, sides of the queen wasp are revealed more and more. Where she at first seems friendly and helpful, Steven notices her anger and impatience grow when he resists helping her switch the babies, which was discussed more in depth in the previous chapter. She now utters "the first unkind words" Steven has heard her speak (Oppel 131), and at the end, when the queen wasp realizes she has lost, she talks in "the foulest language" Steven has ever heard, and he thinks this is like "beholding her for the first time" (Oppel 234), i.e., he now sees her true colors. Similar to her changing personality, the threatening aspects of the queen wasp's physical body are also foregrounded, such as her stinger being visible, "the sharpest and thinnest of thorns" with "a small drop of venom" at the tip (Oppel 172). With the knowledge of Steven's allergy toward wasps, this detail becomes ever the more threatening, which again is intensified by the queen wasp's size.

Despite all these monstrous qualities present in the queen wasp and his deathly allergy toward wasps, Steven is not afraid of her before the very end of the book. The reason for this is manifold, and the explanations which stands out the most are the queen wasp's ability to

manipulate Steven, as well as Steven's desperate wish to have someone to talk to. Through his dreams and his consequent meetings with the queen wasp, Steven admits to thoughts he is ashamed to talk about with anyone else. Even when he meets up with his therapist when things worsen mentally for him, Steven realizes that he does not know how to talk about the baby with anyone, "Except the queen" (Oppel 104). This entails that the queen wasp is the only one he dares to be fully honest with. Steven has always longed for the "perfect listener" (Oppel 106), someone to help him sort things out, and he even made up his own imaginary friend to fill this need when he was younger. The queen wasp fills that void after he stopped seeing his imaginary friend, and with his life being stressful and uncertain, as discussed in chapter one, he feels the need to have someone to confide in, and the queen wasp lets him. In this way, the queen wasp fulfills the monster's role of letting Steven experience "a temporary egress from constraint" (Cohen 1996: 17) where he can be transparent without the fear of being judged.

This dynamic proves to be too intense in the end, however, where Steven hates "how she knew so much about me. I felt invaded" (Oppel 175). The queen wasp does know a lot about him, and this is another one of her monstrous qualities because she uses this knowledge to manipulate and bargain with Steven from the very start. Any time Steven tries to pull away or tries to fish for direct answers, the queen wasp responds with either mean words about his brother or she tries to lure him in by accommodating to his innermost wishes of being normal and not so scared of things. This creates conflicting feelings within Steven, and his feelings mirror the monster's ability to simultaneously repulse and attract. Steven knows that the queen wasp's plan is wrong, but part of him still listens to her and wants to believe her. Because the queen wasp knows so much about him, she also understands how to manipulate him, acting as a symbol for the alluring effect forbidden desires can have on a person. This deep knowledge of Steven stems back to when the queen wasp stung him and he had to go to the hospital, as mentioned in chapter one.

By stinging Steven, the queen wasp explains to him that she "took a little bit of you, a little bit of your DNA" (Oppel 128), and through this incident, they enact a similar process of merging as to that of Conor and his monster. Because, after this merging, it is as if the queen wasp can read Steven's thoughts, and she now knows everything about him, all the way down to his most hidden, repressed wishes. Dissimilar to Conor, however, Steven concludes his story by enforcing the typically expected ending of monsters: he kills the queen wasp. After a consistent period of conversing with her, i.e., stepping across the border, Steven has been at

the risk of becoming monstrous himself, and this monstrosity is released in the end. Because the queen wasp proves to be unyielding in her mission to swap the babies and kill Steven's brother, Steven defeating her acts as a metaphor of overcoming and destroying the values she holds which go against the societal norm. By her very nature, the queen wasp views life differently; she is used to shorter lifespans where her "workers live only four weeks" and how the worker wasps are "Practically interchangeable" (Oppel 78, 79). From her viewpoint, one life can easily be traded for another. The queen wasp's ability to frighten Steven—and consequently the readers, based on the theory of art-horror—reaches its summit when she attacks Steven by plunging her stinger into him, "right through [his] chest, right through [his] heart and out between [his] shoulder blades" (Oppel 232).

This is Steven's turning point, and as the venom seeps into his system, he manages to plunge a knife "into the queen's back" (Oppel 233). Acting as monstrous as he ever has throughout the novel, it ends with Steven putting the knife against the queen wasp's neck and he "sawed and sawed until her head came away" (Oppel 234), resulting in the ultimate slaying of a monster. Here, as in *A Monster Calls*, the child protagonist is allowed to be the frightening one and to express fantasies of "aggression, domination, and inversion" in a delimited, liminal space (Cohen 1996: 17). This act functions as a form of wish-fulfillment as well, where "all that is viewed as undesirable in itself" (Cohen 18), such as Steven's repressed desires, is transferred onto the body of the monster, and thus, by destroying the monster, one also destroys the forbidden wishes. But, as most horror and monster stories, the "monster is always coming back, always at the verge of irruption" (Cohen 20), and this is shown by the queen wasp laying one last egg before she dies, and by doing so she ensures the creation of a new nest since it is the queen who "begins the nest" (Oppel 2015: 53).

The monster of *The Nest* is also one of the natural world, which creates similar associations to the ancient and divine as the yew tree monster does. The queen wasp and her workers are even closer to the divine, however, in that they are *creating* new life. The worker wasps are "regurgitating matter from their mouths and sculpting it into baby flesh" (Oppel 143). Thus, they are a symbol of the circle of life, and this is most directly shown as they build a baby inside their nest but requiring to devour another baby as payment. If one shall live, the other must die. According to the queen wasp, she has "been at this a long time" and some of her babies "have really made a difference" (Oppel 172), a clear nod toward her timelessness and power.

The most direct connection to the collective unconscious happens when Steven claims that he "instinctively" can sense that the queen does not mean him any harm (Oppel 75). As previously mentioned, the collective unconscious can be understood as instinctual behavior. Moreover, the queen wasp can be understood as a motherly symbol, which corresponds to Jung's archetype of *the mother*. This archetype is rather complex and it appears "under an almost infinite variety of aspects" (Jung 1981: 69, para. 158). However, the qualities associated with the mother archetype do a good job at describing the queen wasp, with both her positive and negative sides taken into account. Some of these qualities are "maternal solicitude and sympathy"; "wisdom and spiritual exaltation that transcend reason"; all that "fosters growth and fertility"; "transformation and rebirth", as well as the more negative aspects of "anything that devours, seduces, and poisons"; and "anything secret, hidden, dark" (Jung 1981: 70, para. 158). As the examples have shown so far, the queen wasp can act as a sample of an archetype inhabiting all these qualities. Jung formulated these attributes as "the loving and the terrible mother" to encapsule the ambivalence they present (Jung 1981: 70, para. 158). This archetype is further enhanced by the nest and its connotations to the womb, and the fact that the wasps are growing a baby inside of it: the baby hangs "suspended on a narrow stalk that looked like an umbilical cord, except it fed right into the back of the baby's head" (Oppel 2015: 142). This double-meaning of the nest was explored more in depth in chapter two, where formulations such as the walls of the nest "contracting" (Oppel 50) further support the maternal characteristics of the nest. The nest thus also functions as a safe space, and it is within the nest that Steven kills the queen wasp, and this is another depiction of how the temporality of the monster's access to the human world allows for a "safe realm of expression and play" (Cohen 1996: 17).

The Nest thus follows the genre convictions of horror and the monster story more explicitly than *A Monster Calls* by killing off the monster at the end. This creates a sense of safety for the reader of this book, because the audience knows that they are "safe in the knowledge of its nearing end […] and our liberation from it" (Cohen 1996: 17) based on how the genre usually works. The monster in *The Nest* is another literary representation of how complex and multilayered a monster can be, and it encapsulates the paradox of horror where the monster consists of both attractive and frightening qualities.

Chapter conclusion

As this chapter has shown, monsters are more than just scary, evil beings meant to frighten. Monsters can inspire debates, conversations, questions, changes, etc. A monster's function is as complex as its history. Monsters can act as a tangible form on which to place fears and desires, and so provide us with freedom, if only temporarily.

Furthermore, monsters allow us to make connections, and so, in a way, monsters act as the dreams and/or nightmares of the world. "Monsters are seen vaguely, fleetingly, and are then shielded again by the darkness; indistinctly observed like dreams" (Gilmore 2003: 190), and, like a recurrent nightmare, the monster repetitively shows up in our world.

The monsters of *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* offer complexity and multiple functions, and they can be fictional examples of the role monsters have had in society for centuries as well as the inherent quality of being both frightening and attractive.

Concluding thoughts

As my thesis has shown, the monsters in *A Monster Calls* and *The Nest* appear in a time of need through the child protagonists' dreams in order to fulfill their repressed wishes to help them heal and accept reality. My hope is for this thesis to inspire further research into children's literature, and especially children's literature involving themes thought of as taboo for children, such as grief, death, monsters, trauma, nightmares, and so on. Because, as the theory presented in this thesis has shown, children do pay attention and they often know more than they admit to adults. It is therefore a disservice to write off children's experiences based on them being children.

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