

Intrusion Fantasy as a Cathartic Tool in Patrick Ness *A Monster Calls*

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ABSTRACT

Since its publication in 2011, *A Monster Calls* has attracted the attention of scholars in various ways. The novel is classified as a low fantasy or intrusion fantasy. Previous studies attempted psychoanalytical reading; other studies took stylistic investigation and the rest were thematic. This study analyzes the connection between fantasy and reality and how the supernatural intrudes into the real life of the child hero, Conor. It examines the four stories and how they trespass the main plot in a magical way to save Conor from his nightmares and sufferings. This study attempts to investigate the use of intrusion fantasy as a cathartic tool which is manipulated to help Conor to overcome his bereavement and prepare him to accept his mother's terminal illness. The paper argues that the intrusion fantasy has a purgatory effect that transformed Conor's personality from denier into a resilient one. The study also traces Conor's cathartic journey to achieve internal peace and settlement. In the analysis, the researcher looks at the cathartic effect not from Aristotelian point of view, but from a psychological point of view. The analysis will also shed light on Conor's psyche and how he becomes mentally purged and gains peace of mind.

KEY WORDS: *A Monster Calls*, Catharsis, Cathartic Journey, Intrusion Fantasy, Purgation

1. INTRODUCTION:

A Monster Calls (2011) is a novel written by Patrick Ness, the American-British novelist, journalist and screenwriter. The novel won many awards such as the *British Children's Book of the Year* (2011), the *Kitschies Red Tentacle Award* (2011) for the year's most progressive, intelligent and entertaining works that contain elements of the speculative or fantastic works in the UK, and the *Red House Children's Book Award* (2012) for children's book published in the UK. The book also won two medals, the *Carnegie Medal* (2012) for outstanding new English-language book for children or young adults, and the *Greenaway Medal* (2012) for distinguished illustration in a book for children. The novel is about a 13 years old boy named Conor, who is struggling to cope with the

terminal illness of his mother. Recently, Conor experiences a recurrent nightmare in which a terrifying monster tries to pull his mother down below a dark cliff and Conor at the edge holding onto his mother's hands with all his strength. Every time he sees this dream, he wakes up exactly at 12.07 at midnight. One night as he woke up, he saw an actual monster outside his window. During the day, the monster looks as a yew tree in the church yard, but at night, it turns into a terrifying tree creature. This monster offers to tell Conor three stories, and in return, Conor must tell the fourth story.

The original idea of the book belongs to the English authoress Siobhan Dowd who was diagnosed with cancer and died before writing the story. In an interview with Jim Kay to the *Guardian* (2012), Ness mentioned that he and Siobhan were trying to write something new and unique. He stated that "because I know that this is what Siobhan would have done. She would have set it free, let it grow and change, and so I wasn't trying to guess what she might have written, I was merely following the same process she would have followed, which is a different thing" (Ness, 2012). In the same interview, Ness also mentioned that "I very hastily created the scene of the Monster leaning against the house. It was a technique I hadn't tried before, dictated

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to some degree by the time constraints, which in hindsight may have helped" (Ness 2012). According to Kate Quealy-Gainer, the novel is fully constructed around the idea of a 'mind trip' or the psychological journey of the hero Conor O'Malley. She argues that "Ness brings together history, fantasy, and science fiction in one masterful stroke, interweaving the tropes of each genre to create a unique blend that offers readers an unpredictable but impeccably paced mind trip" (Quealy-Gainer, 2020, p. 441).

The current study differs from previous studies; it provides a psychoanalytic account of the cathartic influence of the four stories. It investigates the intrusion of the fantastical stories into the basic plot of the novel to achieve cathartic purposes. This allows a better understanding of Conor's psyche and how the fantastic stories provide a healing mechanism to purge and teach him to cope with death and loss. It demonstrates how catharsis is manifested as a therapeutic mechanism that serves a purgatory effect. It also traces the hero's cathartic journey to achieve spiritual rejuvenation and mental settlement.

As far as previous studies are concerned, it is worth mentioning that there are some movie reviews published on webpages that discuss the film adaptation of the novel. Such reviews are mainly concerned with film version of the novel which somehow differs from the original text. These reviews are not academic studies; they are published on webpages for movie fans and followers. For example, Darryl Griffiths, in his review "The Fantastical Catharsis of 'A Monster Calls'" (2017), deals with the cinematic adaptation of the novel. Thomas Mariani, a podcaster about films and movies, also discusses the movie version of the novel in his review "A Monster Calls (2016): Emotional Catharsis Vs Manipulation". What this paper intends to do differs from the above-mentioned reviews. It looks at the original text, not the film adaptation; it discusses how the intrusion fantasy is used as a cathartic tool to help Conor restore his normal life and accept its cruelties.

Before conducting the analysis, it is important to have an idea about the term 'catharsis' and how it is used in this research. The following section provides some information about the concept of catharsis which will be adopted in this study. This helps to understand the meaning and the implication of the term.

2. THE CONCEPT OF CATHARSIS

Catharsis, according to psychoanalytic theory, is an emotional emancipation of unconscious turmoil; emotions of anxiety, trauma, tension and frustration (Scheff, 1979). The term 'catharsis' has a Greek origin; it is derived from the Greek word "katharsis" which means 'purification' or 'cleansing' (Wikipedia 2021). The

term has more than one sense; traditionally, it is used by Aristotle in his *Poetics* to refer to the effects a tragedy has on the audience. For Aristotle, "the purpose of tragedy is to arouse terror and pity and thereby effect the catharsis of these emotions" (Britannica, 2021). So, one can say that, in literature, 'catharsis' is used to refer to "an emotional discharge through which a person can achieve a state of moral or spiritual renewal or a state of liberation from anxiety and stress" (Bhal, 2017, p.78). In this sense, the purpose of catharsis is to change individuals in a positive way by emptying out all the negative emotions. The term is also used in a medical sense to refer to the process of "purging the body - and especially the bowels - of unwanted material" (Merriam-Webster, 2021). This medical interpretation applies to a physical process of cleansing the intestines of harmful contents. However, this medical meaning has been used metaphorically in a similar sense to the literary interpretation mainly to be applied on emotions and mental states i.e. purging the soul of repressed emotions.

The nineteenth century has brought a conceptual change concerning 'catharsis'; the term has entered the field of psychology as a therapeutic technique at the hands of Sigmund Freud and his colleague Josef Breuer. They provided a new theory about catharsis; it is seen as a "process of emotional discharge which brings relief to emotional tension"; they call it 'abreaction' (Scheff, 1979, p.47). Freud and Breuer are among the pioneers to use the term 'catharsis' as a psychotherapeutic tool in healing patients who suffer from hysteria by convincing them to recall their traumatic experiences and face them. For example, a person can achieve catharsis by bringing these unconscious repressed feelings and memories to light (Breuer & Freud 1974). This technique proves to be successful in relieving the symptoms of distress and anxiety. Freud asserts that the unconscious side of our minds has the biggest reservoir of suppressed emotions; emotions that we cannot speak about or even face. So, by using catharsis as a healing mechanism, one can achieve success in relieving patients from their daily or long-term psychological issues (Breuer & Freud, 1974).

From what has been said above, we can recognize three different contexts of the term 'catharsis': literary catharsis, medical catharsis and psychological catharsis. In this paper, the term 'catharsis' is used in its psychological sense to refer to "any psychoanalytic technique in which the client is led to recognize the underlying basis for underlying mental issues, and release associated suppressed or forgotten emotions by talking them out" (Medical Dictionary, 2021). The researcher limits himself to discuss the examples where the intrusion fantasy is used as a therapeutic tool (cathartic method) to heal Conor's repressed emotions

and painful experiences that relate to his mother's chronic illness.

3. ANALYSIS

In *A Monster Calls*, Ness focuses on the emotional sufferings of Conor who struggles with the idea of his mother's death. The novel exposes the tremendous inner conflict of Conor who has to live and suffer the grief of losing his mother. Ness projects Conor's mentality and his subconscious through the arrival of the monster with his fantasy stories. The paper argues that these stories help Conor in emptying his negative traumatic feelings and make him encounter his fears. In other words, they succor him to accept the truth of his mother's unrecoverable illness. The paper discusses the use of intrusion fantasy as a cathartic method that channel Conor's repressed emotions and release his feelings. For the purpose of the current study, the researcher uses the phrase 'cathartic journey' to refer to Conor's cathartic experience throughout the novel. Catharsis, in this perspective, involves both a powerful emotional component in which strong feelings are felt and expressed, as well as a cognitive component in which Conor gains new insights about himself and accepts his life without his mother.

It is very important, at this stage, to define the term 'intrusion fantasy' and show its connection to the main plot and how it is used as a cathartic method in the novel. The definition draws widely from the seminal work by Farah Mendlesohn (2008). In *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, Mendlesohn defines 'intrusion fantasy' as something fantastical stepping into the world of the protagonist, disrupting what has been established as normal, and treated as strange and unfamiliar by the character who is obliged to accept the fantastic as normal (Mendlesohn, 2008, pp.113-115). According to Barnes, this type of fantasy interrupts the normal symmetry of the original story and violates the personal and the mental space of the hero (Barnes, 1961, p. 42). On one hand, in the intrusion fantasy, the hero shares his feelings and fears with readers. On the other hand, the intrusive story seems to be so clear and real for both the characters and the readers, but basically for the characters, that it "likes to breathe down the reader/protagonist's neck" (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. 116). The language used in this style of writing is normally gothic and it has supernatural visual effects. Mendlesohn compares it to rhythm that is full of tension and that continues to reach the end of the story (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. 117). The setting of the intrusive stories is basically "spooky" and consists of horrific places like graveyards or deserted open areas where characters are captured by sounds of fear, horror and surprise. The reader also can experience the shock of quick shift from

normal to horrific scenes that are full of fearful voices and sudden surprises (Mendlesohn, 2008, p. 121). In such stories, the characters feel unified with the intrusive tales, they not feel as outsiders but actually are inside them observing and feeling everything. They learn to find themselves and to face their fears to live a normal life; a life that is far from denial and fear (Barnes, 1961, p. 42). Intrusion fantasies adopt a realistic frame of storytelling because they take the normal world as their center and the hero's involvement with the fantastical actions drives the story (Robin, 2016).

In *A Monster Calls*, Ness blends two worlds together to portray the psychological dilemma of the child hero: the realistic world which resembles the daily life of Conor and the fantastical world which is the world of the yew tree monster that drives the story from the beginning till the end. There is a strong blend between intrusion fantasy and the change that happens within the hero of the book in terms of purgation and rejuvenation. The intrusive stories break into the mentality of Conor and their purgatory effect becomes clearly reflected on his behavior as well as the way of accepting things around him. They shake him from inside and change his personality in a positive way. At the beginning, the hero finds himself denying the fantasy world of the monster and he is unable to control it. Dabrowski states that Conor apparently lacks "control of the fantasy he enters into, or, more accurately, the fantasy that intrudes into his world" (Dabrowski, 2016, p. 54). However, he gradually accepts it to reach a state of purgation. According to Farnia and Pourgiv, "the existence of the monster makes the story a fantasy and a therapy" (Farnia & Pourgiv, 2017, p. 44). The intrusive story appears to take the shape of a monster that is intentionally put by the writer to help achieve the cathartic experience of the hero and help him reconcile with his unconscious fears and face the trauma of the death of his mother. This technique is explained by Dabrowski in the following way:

Fantasy, introduced in the form of dark and ambiguous monster companions, is a crucial narrative strategy that externalizes complex, often unconscious, emotional states related to loss and transition. Fantasy is thus employed to depict and facilitate the process of working through the traumatic aspects of growing into adolescence and confronting difficult new realities (Dabrowski, 2016, p. 94).

The invasion of the fantastic into the main story helps resolving the core issue of the novel which is accepting reality. Conor faces difficulty in accepting the inevitable death of his mother; therefore, the monster comes and invades his world to provide help. Conor needs to be purged from his traumatic feelings and suppressed anxieties to shift into a new person living a whole new life by facing his most terrifying nightmares.

The story opens with a recurrent nightmare, "The one he'd been having a lot lately. The one with the darkness, the wind and the screaming. The one with the hands slipping from his grasp, no matter how hard he tried to hold on" (*A Monster Calls*, p. 6). This nightmare resides deeply in Conor's subconscious and it shows his buried fears. He keeps seeing this nightmare each night until the appearance of the monster at 12.07. A voice calls for him from outside, that comes from the area where the church is situated. When Conor walks to the window he sees a monster that has a mass of branches and looks like a human:

As Conor watched, the uppermost branches of the tree gathered themselves into a great and terrible face, shimmering into a mouth and nose and even eyes, peering back at him. Other branches twisted around one another, always creaking, always groaning, until they formed two long arms and a second leg to set down beside the main trunk. The rest of the tree gathered itself into a spine and then a torso, the thin, needle-like leaves weaving together to make a green, furry skin that moved and breathed as if there were muscles and lungs underneath. Already taller than Conor's window, the monster grew wider as it brought itself together, filling out to a powerful shape, one that looked somehow strong, somehow mighty. It stared at Conor the whole time, and he could hear the loud, windy breathing from its mouth. It set its giant hands on either side of his window, lowering its head until its huge eyes filled the frame, holding Conor with its glare (*A Monster Calls*, p. 7).

The arrival of the monster here marks the intrusion of the fantasy into the main plot of the novel and the beginning of the cathartic journey. The monster tells Conor that he will offer assistance by telling him three stories and in return Conor must tell his own, "The one with the darkness and the wind and the screaming" (*A Monster Calls*, p. 6). It appears clearly that the monster is invading the world of Conor and trying to communicate with him for a serious purpose. Everything seems real because Ness describes the monster in a way that Conor and the reader can feel and sense its physical moves like his breath, sound and body gestures (Ulfa, 2021). Even the room becomes full of action like the sound of the shattering glass and broken tiles. At this point, the reader realizes that the fantasy here is actually inside the reality of Conor. The intrusion of the fantastic world is so powerful to the extent that it is hard to tell the fantasy from the reality. The intrusive moment is best described in the following way:

The monster roared even louder and smashed an arm through Conor's window, shattering glass and wood and brick. A huge, twisted, branch-wound hand grabbed Conor around the middle and lifted him off the floor. It swung him out of his room and into the night,

high above his back garden, holding him up against the circle of the moon, its fingers clenching so hard against Conor's ribs he could barely breathe. Conor could see raggedy teeth made of hard, knotted wood in the monster's open mouth, and he felt warm breath rushing up towards him (*A Monster Calls*, p. 8).

Conor is drawn into this invasion through inserting the fantastical into the real world. The purpose behind the intrusion of the fantasy is to provide Conor with a moment of psychological relief and purgation. Dabrowski comments on the function of the intrusive fantasy; she sees it as a therapy, not a runaway motion. Conor retreats into fantasy at moments when he is out of control and yet the fantasy is not an escape, but only a healing journey. In other words, exposing himself to fantasy helps him to accept the death of his mother (Farnia & Pourgiv, 2017). Fantasy, in this respect, helps Conor to realize the truth; the truth about the inevitable death of his mother as the monster says to him, "You will tell me the truth" (*A Monster Calls*, p. 18).

The cathartic journey starts with the chapter entitled "THE FIRST TALE" in which the monster tells Conor a story about a wicked queen who used to live a long time ago on the same land where Conor is living now. She was accused of being a killer and a witch who poisoned the king. Later, she wanted to marry the king's grandson who had a girlfriend, a farmer's daughter. The couple escapes to another kingdom so that they can marry there and return only when the prince is eighteen years old to claim back his throne. The tale takes a surprising turn when the young prince sleeps with his girlfriend and wakes up to find her dead. He rushes immediately to tell the people of his kingdom that the queen is responsible for the death of his girlfriend. The villagers want to burn the queen alive but the monster interferes and saves the queen by taking her into an isolated island. Conor was confused at hearing this tricky story, he says: "How could you possibly save a murderer?" (*A Monster Calls*, p. 28). The monster clarified that the queen did not kill the poor girl; it was the young boy who did so. The monster took Conor to the fantastical world of the tale by performing a certain movement with his hand:

The monster opened its huge hands in a certain way, and a breeze blew up, bringing a mist with it. Conor's house was still behind him, but the mist covered his back garden, replacing it with a field with a giant yew in the centre and a man and a woman sleeping at its base (*A Monster Calls*, p. 28).

Conor is actually inside this imaginary world seeing all the actions of the characters and feeling their anguish. He is unable to understand the morale of the story and he thinks that this story is going to save him from his grandmother, who is supposed to take care of him after the death of his mother. He asked the monster, "So how is that supposed to save me from her?" The monster

replied, "It is not her you need saving from" (*A Monster Calls*, p. 29). The monster implicitly suggests that Conor needs to be saved from himself because he cheats himself that everything is going to be okay and his mother will not die. Conor stands for those who refuse to accept the painful truth, those who choose to live in denial. The monster comments, "Sometimes people need to lie to themselves most of all" (*A Monster Calls*, p. 28). The tale, originally, focuses on the nature of the relationship between Conor and his grandmother; she treats him like a small child; a fact that disrupts Conor's feelings of responsibility towards his mother. The grandmother stands for the reality that Conor tries to escape from. As Dabrowski states, "the monster starts to enter into the narrative during this interaction as Conor, who is desperate for rescue from her [grandmother] and the unwelcome truths she represents" (Dabrowski, 2016, p. 59). Conor's unspoken fear and desperation are acted out in a form of anger which is usually directed towards his grandmother. He always sees her as his own antagonist; he misjudges her and thinks that she is not providing enough support to his sick mother.

The intrusive fantasy here becomes a necessity for Conor to escape from his reality. Basically, it has two cathartic functions: the first one is to prepare Conor for a future without his mother. Conor must accept the truth that his mother will die and he needs to understand that life goes on and that there are people such as his grandmother who will care about him in his mother's absence. The monster helps him to open up his eyes and face his innermost hidden feelings of fear and anxiety. According to Freud, this has to do with the unconscious mind, Freud sees the unconscious as a reservoir of many hidden feelings and secrets that any person needs to face and deal with (Freud, 1963). Thus, the monster, through the first tale, pushes Conor to see and deal with his repressed fears that take the shape of the constant nightmares that he sees recurrently. In this respect, the nightmares can be considered as a representation of Conor's subconscious which needs to be cleansed and purified (Ulfa 2021). The second cathartic function is to correct Conor's opinion about his grandmother; the monster tries to show him that his grandmother is not bad. She resembles the queen in the story who was accused falsely of being a murderer. The monster hints that Conor needs to accept the fact that he must stay with his grandmother to start a new life because she cares for him. Although the monster denies that he is teaching Conor a moral lesson, he appears to teach Conor a way of behaving. In other words, the monster tries to make Conor understand the truth about human nature and life in general. Most of people are neither good nor bad; they are a combination of both tributes. The cathartic function ends with a new realization from Conor's side which will be reflected on his behavior later

in the story. As we see at the end of the novel, Conor began to see the other side of his grandmother's personality. He realized that she also suffers because she has to lose her only daughter. Therefore, he and his grandmother, for the first time, start a true and honest conversation. They confess to each other two truths, the first that they are "not the most natural fit" (*A Monster Calls*, p. 82) for each other. However, they can get along with it because they have something in common, which is Conor's mother. This would be a good point to start a new relation. The culmination of the catharsis resides in the fact that Conor, now, becomes able to access the truth about his contradictory feelings and how to get along with them.

Conor's cathartic journey continues with the second story. The monster appears again at 12.07 at the living room of Conor's grandma "I have come to tell you the second tale, the monster said" (*A Monster Calls*, p. 48). The monster took Conor to a dreamy land where it is covered with metal and brick "The monster opened its hands again, and a mist rolled through his grandma's sitting room. When it cleared, Conor and the monster stood on a field of green, overlooking a valley of metal and brick" (*A Monster Calls*, p. 45). It is a story about an apothecary who lived on a green land; he used to sell herbal medicine for people. One day he asked the priest to chop down the yew tree that is near his house claiming that it has healing powers, but, the priest refused. The next day, the priest of the village gave a sermon to his congregation to inform them that the apothecary is stealing their money for nothing. People started to neglect the apothecary and stopped buying his medicines. One day, the priest's two daughters got sick and he sought the help of the apothecary but the latter refused. Eventually, the poor girls died. The monster told Conor that he punished the priest by knocking his home down to earth. He asked Conor to join him in destroying the priest's house. Then, Conor helped the monster in destroying everything, the fireplace, the windows, the furniture and the walls. Then, Conor comes out of the fantasy to notice that he destroyed everything in his grandmother's living room.

The second tale offers Conor an opportunity to release out all his harbored anger. Conor is actually emptying his anger by breaking and knocking things down; this physical activity shows the amount of Conor's suppressed anger. According to catharsis theory, acting aggressively can serve as an effective way to purge aggressive and hostile feelings. For example, Freud and Breuer argue that a patient with suppressed angers must undergo a release process to empty his/her anger to feel relaxation and rejuvenation (Breuer & Freud, 1974, p. 156). This applies to Conor who is invited by the monster to take part in the act of destruction and to scream out to purge his buried anger. Conor begins to

smash everything his hands can reach until he falls down in exhaustion. The violent act followed by a moment of silence, then a voice in the breeze whispered to him that "Destruction is very satisfying" (*A Monster Calls*, p. 50). Ulfa believes that the faint voice here could be the voice of the monster or the subconscious of Conor himself after achieving a physical and an emotional release of his repressed anger (Ulfa, 2021). The feelings of anger have controlled Conor especially when he met his father who just arrived from America. The visit of the father had a reverse impact on Conor's psyche; instead of supporting him in his hard times, it adds up to his distress. Now, Conor realizes the selfishness of his father who implicitly declares there is no place for him in his new life. The father's selfishness is compared to the priest's in the second tale. Therefore, Conor was so willing to participate in destroying the priest's house, "TEAR THE WHOLE THING DOWN!" (*A Monster Calls*, p.49).

From a cathartic point of view, the function of the second tale is to provide a source of purgation for Conor's repressed anger which is caused by his mother's illness, his father's neglect and his grandmother's austerity. The second tale helps Conor achieve catharsis by spilling out his anger bravely without being afraid of anyone. On the other hand, after releasing his anger, Conor becomes a new person. As Adam Philips argues, anger often functions to reveal problems and help self-realization (Philips 1998, p.87). Moreover, expressing anger can be seen as a healing process. This has been explicitly discussed in a conversation that Conor had with his mother. She told him never to keep his anger repressed, "You be as angry as you need to be," she said. "Don't let anyone tell you otherwise. Not your grandma, not your dad, no one. And if you need to break things, then by God, you break them good and hard" (*A Monster Calls*, p. 71). From the mother's point of view, anger is part of the grieving process that everyone should try at some point in their lives. She implicitly suggests that if a person suppresses his anger or other negative emotions, this would delay the process of coping and moving forward. On the other hand, speaking out such emotions would empower and strengthen him.

The third tale also contains a manifestation of Conor's emotional catharsis. It takes place in the dining room of Conor's school. The monster breaks into Conor's reality after a conversation takes place between Conor and his bully friend Harry. Harry decides not to bully Conor again by claiming that he no longer sees him: "Goodbye, O'Malley," Harry said, looking into Conor's eyes. I no longer see you. Then he lets go of Conor's hand, turned his back, and walked away" (*A Monster Calls*, p. 62). This makes Conor to feel angry, then, the dining hall's clock ticks 12: 07 and it is the exact time for the cathartic

intrusive fantasy to begin. The monster appears saying: "It is time for the third tale, the monster said from behind him" (*A Monster Calls*, p. 62). The third intrusive story is about an invisible man who is tired of being unseen by people; people got used to not seeing him and this made him angry as the monster narrates: "it was that people had become used to not seeing him" (*A Monster Calls*, p. 63). The timing of the third tale is very intense; since the conflict between Harry and Conor reaches its peak by that time. Conor is filled with desperation and hopelessness as his mind is preoccupied with the new treatment for his sick mother. Conor is no longer afraid to face Harry's mockery and bullying behavior. As he was listening to the third tale, Conor feels oneness with the invisible man and he is trying to prove himself in front of the whole school. According to Jersild, those who suffer from loneliness and desperation feel the burden of not being realized by others (Jersild, 1959, p. 253). Conor is yearning to be seen by his friends and he is asking to be treated as a normal child; not the pathetic child with an ill mother. Then, with the help of the monster, Conor starts to hit Harry on the face angrily and furiously:

Conor had felt what the monster was doing to Harry, felt it in his own hands. When the monster gripped Harry's shirt, Conor felt the material against his own palms. When the monster struck a blow, Conor felt the sting of it in his own fist. When the monster held Harry's arm behind his back, Conor had felt Harry's muscles resisting (*A Monster Calls*, p. 65).

In a similar vein to the second tale, Conor has used the monster as an outlet for his repressed emotions. Conor is consumed by his grief and anger to the extent that he channels his rage through physical violence. The effect of the monster is massive; it is actually controlling Conor, not only entering his reality but, taking control of it. Conor identifies himself with the monster and he is doing whatever the monster is doing to capture people's attention. Conor is pushed to empty his anger over Harry; to make Harry and the rest of the boys to see him as a normal child.

In this stage of Conor's cathartic experience, his mentality takes control over his body. According to Freud and Breuer, any patient with suppressed fears or anger, must remember their traumatic experience once witnessed throughout their life time in order to deal with it and face it to achieve psychological catharsis (Breuer & Freud, 1974, p.263). Conor, in this respect, has remembered Harry's aggressive behavior and how he used to hit him severely in front of the other boys. Harry functions as trigger that stimulates Conor to face his painful condition and to prove to the whole school that he is trying his best to be normal and is trying to understand the future loss of his mother. Conor wants to change himself from within but he is struggling hard to

achieve this massive metamorphosis because of repressed feelings of fear and loneliness. At this stage, the intrusion fantasy serves as a purgatory method for Conor to save him from the feelings of guilt and isolation. It has an important function to show Conor's dilemma to the reader and how it influences his relationship with others. It is manifested through his connection with the bully Harry. Thus, from a cathartic point of view, the third tale is a wake-up call for Conor to stop living inside his defense bubble; it helps him gradually unravel the truth from his own bubble of defense.

The cathartic peak of Conor appears near the end of the novel; the monster asks Conor to tell him a fourth tale about the "truth" and if he does not, he will be eaten alive: "you will tell me the fourth tale. You will tell me the truth. "And what if I don't?" Conor said. The monster gave the evil grin again. Then I will eat you alive" (*A Monster Calls*, p.18). The final intrusive story heralds the truth that Conor keeps denying. It shows how the monster is holding Conor tight in his hand trying to convince him to narrate the forth tale; the tale of his nightmare. Conor is actually living his nightmare:

Conor ever since his mother had first been hospitalized, from before that when she'd started the treatments that made her lose her hair, from before that when she'd had flu that didn't go away until she went to a doctor and it wasn't flu at all, from before even that when she'd started to complain about how tired she was feeling, ever since before all that, ever since forever, it felt like, the nightmare had been there, stalking him, surrounding him, cutting him off, making him alone (*A Monster Calls*, p. 75).

Conor must free himself from the nightmare by bravely recalling and facing it to achieve total purgation. In this case, Conor is taken into the world of his nightmare to re-live his innermost fears in order to achieve purgation. During this process, Conor remembers the torturing events of his nightmare and experience strong emotional reactions. In his nightmarish world, there were two monsters, the yew tree monster who is the friend of him and the monster who is taking his mother away. Everything around Conor is collapsing and he sees his mother standing at the edge of a cliff waving at him but, "The real monster was coming" (*A Monster Calls*, p.76). Conor attempts to protect his mother from falling and he catches her hand tightly; refusing to let her go. At that moment, the yew tree monster steps towards Conor encouraging him to speak the truth, the truth of letting his mother go: "No!" Conor said his voice breaking. You must. "No!" Conor said again, looking down into his mother's face- As the truth came all of a sudden- As the nightmare reached its most perfect moment- "No!" Conor screamed one more

time- And his mother fell." (*A Monster Calls*, p. 77). Conor refuses to tell the truth, claiming that his mother has slipped from his hand. But the truth is different; he intentionally lets her hand go. He wants to put an end to his and her constant sufferings because she underwent all sorts of chemotherapy and took useless medications. He lets her go to continue his life like any other normal child. He is afraid of admitting the painful truth to himself and to the monster who already knew that: "You could have held on for longer, the monster said, but you let her fall. You loosened your grip and let the nightmare take her" (*A Monster Calls*, p.79). In the end, Conor admits the truth: "I can't stand knowing that she'll go! I just want it to be over! I want it to be finished!" (*A Monster Calls*, p.79). The monster consoles Conor that it is not his fault to let his mother go; actually, it is part of human nature: "You were merely wishing for the end of pain, the monster said. Your own pain. An end to how it isolated you. It is the most human wish of all" (*A Monster Calls*, p. 80).

As far as catharsis is concerned, the purpose of the forth tale is to relieve Conor from feelings of pain and guilt towards his mother. It gives Conor an insight about himself and about what being a human looks like. Conor must learn to accept life in all its gains and pains; he should also accept reality even when it is hard. He must come in terms with the idea of losing his mother forever (Farnia & Pourgiv, 2017, p.2). From a psychological perspective, Conor has to go through the experience of pain in order to achieve purgation. Breuer and Freud argue that in order to achieve full purgation, an individual must re-experience, partially or fully, the traumatic events or nightmares that trouble his/her psyche (Breuer and Freud, 1974, p.186). Based on this argument, Conor - with the help of the monster - is provided with a chance to confront all his conflicting emotions. He is taken back to a moment where all his fears are culminating. Thus, the fourth tale paves the way for Conor to reveal his repressed emotions and to respond to them instead of denying them. In this regard, the fourth tale serves as an instrument of "psychological empowerment" (Farnia & Pourgiv, 2017, p. 46). For Conor, speaking the truth sets him free of the feeling of guilt and regret. In other words, the fourth tale is therapeutic; it allows Conor to lift the burden of his mother's illness and his constant feeling of culpability. According to Nicolette Jones, Conor's cathartic journey passed through four stages "he is first an observer, then a participant, then a hero, then he tells his own story" (Jones, 2012). Conor is provided with a space to absorb all the repressed conflicts that contribute to his desperation and state of denial. Telling his own story is part of the therapeutic technique intended by the monster to help Conor achieve healing. Conor's cathartic

journey ends with acceptance, he accepts his mother's departure as he accepts life's curtly.

4. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that *A Monster Calls* has manipulated intrusion fantasy for cathartic purposes. Conor is guided via these fantasy tales to gradually come in terms with losing his mother to the fatal disease. They provide a cathartic route for his repressed emotions. For example, Conor acts these stories out in his own life, and this acting out channels the cathartic outlet. The stories have empowered Conor in multiple ways; they make him realize the true nature of humans, their frailty and their selfishness. They also teach Conor how to put up with emotional states such as grief and desperation, and how to accept reality after all. The stories allow Conor to say the truth and acknowledge his fear of loss and release the repressed emotional conflicts as an ordinary human. They have tamed his wild personality and brought him back from the state of denial into a state of resilience. This reconciliation can be considered as a culmination of the cathartic process.

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