

**A Journey Of Self-discovery
Through The Book
“*A Monster Calls*”
A heuristic inquiry**

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Abstract

This study journeys my experience of discovering the hidden, unknown, and unconscious parts of self through the use of a literary book “*The Monster Calls*”. This was done through the use of heuristic methodology and methods. Findings included a mapping out of my processes related to early and recent losses, experiencing and re-experiencing, grief, fear, fury, adaptation, and connection; learning and bringing into consciousness the various building blocks that unconsciously construct different parts of my self and my internalised biasness; and further developing the sense of consciously noticing, sensing, observing, and moving in and out of different states. Further research and gains for psychotherapy are discussed alongside strengths and limitations of this study.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material (except where explicitly defined), nor material which, to substantial extent, has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Sheryn Fung (Candidate)

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Section 1: Introduction

In this section, I will introduce the beginnings of my research journey and how come I came to this research topic.

My journey seemingly started in the summer of 2019. It was the last days of my penultimate university year, before the quintessential New Zealand summer break of November to February. I had experienced two emotionally significant group farewells, where after each, an individual came up to talk with me for speaking to and being with the grief present in the room. One of these individuals, Darla*, wondered about how she could inhabit that space more while expressing her appreciation for me being able to step into it. My conversation with her prompted my wonderings of the following – what was it about grief that seemed to call out to me? How come I was able to sense, feel, and be affected by the underlying emotions so strongly? I found this curious as I was aware of how I naturally found goodbyes very hard, sometimes seemingly more so than others around me. I thought it may be interesting to wonder about this, to see if it was a phenomenon that I could possibly explore in my then upcoming research paper.

There was a slight dilemma. I had previously intended to explore a different research area in my research paper, and with my new wonderings, I felt uncertain as to which to investigate. I also was unsure as to the methodology and methods I would be using. I decided to allow myself free reign during the summer break to see what material, subject topics, etc, attracted my attention, and hence which I may gravitate more towards. I also decided I would make notes on where my free associative explorations took me. Little did I know, these actions reflect similar parallel processes that constitute the methodology of heuristic research – I will expand more on this in my Methodology section.

During that summer, I found myself gravitating towards books and movies. By the start of the new year (2020), I noticed that I had landed on a movie and two books. These were materials I found myself wondering about and discussing with my academic supervisor, my clinical therapist, and my friends, which indicated to me a significance in the stories that

*Name changed to protect confidentiality

each told. I also, at that point, noticed that one of the similar underlying themes and threads in these materials was grief. This noticing highlighted clearly to me the research area I was drawn to and to which I subsequently decided to focus on.

In looking at the three materials I landed on, the movie and the first material I felt myself drawn to was “*What Dreams May Come*”. This American movie, starring Robin Williams, came out in 1998; it was based on a 1978 book of the same name, written by American author Richard Matheson (IMDB, n.d.; What dreams may come (film), 2020; What dreams may come (Matheson novel), 2020). To me, it featured themes of accidental death, grief, loss, suicide, the notion of personal heavens and hells, forgiveness, connection, and hope.

One of the two books and the second material that caught my eye and whose narrative stayed with me after was “*Grief Is The Thing With Feathers*”. This book, published in 2015, was written by English author Max Porter, with the story set in London (Faber, 2021; Porter, 2015). It describes a tale of a man who had suddenly lost his wife, of his two boys who unexpectedly lost their mother, and of a crow who visits them while they were in the midst of despair.

The second book and the final material that I gravitated to was “*The Monster Calls*”. This book, published in 2011, was written by British-American author Patrick Ness, with the idea of the book originating from an Irish author Siobhan Dowd who unfortunately passed from cancer in 2007 (Bird, 2011; Emanuel, 2019; Ness, 2022; The Siobhan Dowd Trust, 2016). This book narrates the story of a 13-year-old boy Conor, his life experiences during a time when his mother is dying of cancer, and a tree monster that visits him during this time.

Out of the three materials, it was the book by Patrick Ness (and Siobhan Dowd) that evoked the most in me and lingered the longest with me. This book surprised me with its intensity, and the mixture of emotions that arose in me caught me off guard. Through my casual first reading of the book that summer, I felt sadness and relief, and yet also noticed in myself strong reactions of surprise, annoyance, and disgust towards various aspects and responses of the numerous characters and the environments they are written to be in. It was

the one book where I found myself proclaiming out loud, upon finishing, that I never wanted to look at or read again. My strong reactions intrigued me, and after some pondering, I felt that it may be pertinent to explore deeper what came up for me.

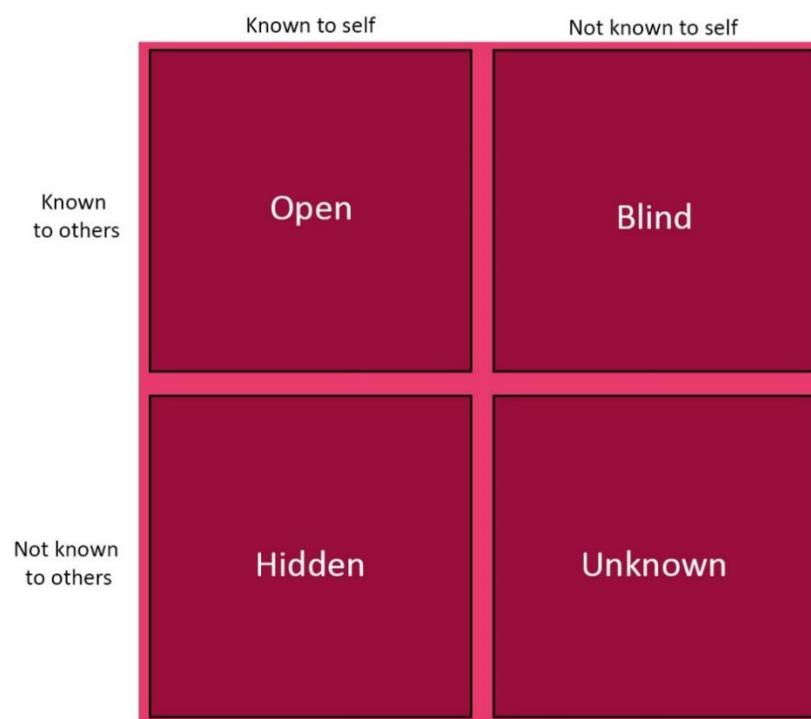
Why this is so stemmed from my wonderings of potentially being blind to my own biased perceptions and perspectives as well as the possible unknown parts of myself that had been emotively touched by the book. Being a psychotherapist in training and to be ever-learning, I wondered and questioned how both aspects would have been unconsciously influencing my clinical work thus far and how it may continue to do so in my future work with clients. It is for this reason I felt the pertinence for me to explore those biased and unknown parts of myself by purposefully immersing myself deeply into pages of the book “*The Monster Calls*”, chapter by chapter, in order to explore and illuminate the parts of myself that are unknown and blind to me.

At this stage of my research, and after much thought (as can be seen in the *Prologue* of my Methodology section), I felt it may be pertinent to stay open to the possible different themes and learnings that might come up for me in the process of my research. I decided that even if “grief” had been the underlying theme that persuaded me to start this research journey, my cursory read of the book “*The Monster Calls*” highlighted to me that there may be more to discover in my heuristic journey – this turned out to be true and will be elaborated on in the later chapters of this writing piece, which I belatedly realised I have written in a way to allow the reader come and experience with me the curving paths and contours of my heuristic discovery journey. Hence, in keeping with the heuristic methodology of following my intuition, and allowing myself the space to focus and reflect on all that may come up for me in my research process and immersion into the book “*The Monster Calls*”, I decided at this point that my research question would tentatively be “*A heuristic exploration of the book “The Monster Calls”*”.

Section 2: Literature Review

In this section, I will be doing a literature review which looks at the importance of self-exploration/self-awareness and its links with using art mediums, specifically literary books. I will then look at research previously done in relation to the book “*The Monster Calls*”, leading to my justification of doing this research.

According to Yalom (2002), a therapist’s most valuable instrument is the therapist’s own self. It is strongly established that it is the therapist’s personality that is key when working with people, ideally infused with empathy, curiosity, imagination, emotional genuineness, and allowing for the creation of space (see McWilliams, 2004; Symington, 1996; Winnicott, 1971; and Yalom, 2002). It is also highly indicated that it is the therapist’s own discovery, learning, and integration of the different parts of themselves – especially of their darkest, most frightening, and hated parts – that allows a therapist to grow as a person and as an analyst by developing their capacity to observe, tolerate, and contain dynamics that will arise from within themselves, clients, and the therapeutic work (see Bion, 1962a; Fromm-Reichmann, 1960; Kohut, 1968; McWilliams, 2004; Symington, 1996; and Yalom, 2002). A way of explaining this self-awareness growth “bubble” is through the “*Johari Window*”, developed by Joe Luft and Harry Ingham in 1955 (Figure 1). The “*Johari Window*” includes two quadrants “*Blind*” and “*Unknown*”, pointing to the potential of much discovery about oneself. Usually in psychotherapeutic training, personal therapy and supervision are pertinent in aiding and guiding a training therapist in their journey of self-discovery (McWilliams, 2004; Symington, 1996; Yalom, 2002). However, there are also other means of discovery, e.g., through the arts such as literature, drawings, poetry, folktales and myths, philosophy, and sciences (as indicated by Freud, 1978; Kohut, 1968; McWilliams, 2004; and Ogden, 2001).

Figure 1*The Johari Window*

Note. The Johari Window as a graphic model of interpersonal awareness. From “University of California Los Angeles, Proceedings of the Western Training Laboratory in Group Development” by J. Luft and H. Ingham, 1955. Copyright 1955 by Luft & Ingham.

In my search for research texts encompassing the use of arts for therapeutic exploration and discovery, I discovered that the research and scope is vast. Encyclopedia Britannica (2018) classifies the following as *arts* – literature (including poetry, drama, stories), paintings, drawings, sculptures, theatre, dance, music, photography, and motion pictures. In addition to such an immense classification, a general search also showed up a multitude of articles and books detailing the histories, ideas, theories, and applications of the different forms of arts in the field of therapy and psychoanalysis. Due to the massive array of material and in order to have a more manageable, focused exploration, I decided to narrow down my search to *texts which explicitly explores books or written literature* and how this

connects or intersects with psychotherapy and/or psychoanalysis in terms of exploration of the self.

With the aforementioned narrowed down criteria in mind, I searched the keywords ‘*psychotherapy*’, ‘*psychoanalysis*’, ‘*exploration of self*’, ‘*self-exploration*’, ‘*written literature*’, ‘*stories*’, and ‘*books*’ on various search engines and online databases including Google, the AUT library search tool, and the *Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing (PEP)* database. From these searches, I found several relevant articles and textbooks.

The three examples of relevant textbooks I found in my search that explored aspects of using literature in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis, were as follows: -

1. Kidd (2011)’s “*Freud in Oz: At the intersections of psychoanalysis and children's literature*”.

This content book plots the history and cultural journey of how children’s literature informed and connects with psychoanalysis.

2. Rollin & West (1999)’s “*Psychoanalytic Responses to Children’s Literature*”.

This theoretical body of work speaks to literature and stories holding similar explorative and therapeutic function as therapy; and explores certain characters and authors of specific literatures and stories using various psychoanalysis theories. The book also delves into “reader’s responses to children’s books” (p. xii).

3. Holmes (2014)’s “*The Therapeutic Imagination: Using literature to deepen psychodynamic understanding and enhance empathy*”.

Among its various postulations, this content book dives into how literature and creativity help foster therapists’ understanding of their imagination and their unconscious, through the lenses of Freudian and attachment theories. It also explores the shared similarities of literature and psychodynamic therapy – these included literature being able to provide the structure and a secure space for creative uncertainty and exploration; the importance of process and space along

with the narrative of the client; and reflection on the part of the clinician in such an exploration.

In terms of articles I found, there were the following: -

1. Various review journal articles on the above three textbooks by Kidd (2011), Rollin & West (1999), and Holmes (2014) – you are welcomed to look at reviews by Coats (2013) and Krips (2013) for Kidd (2011); reviews by Rudd (2001) and Galbraith (2001) for Rollin & West (1999); and reviews by Cole (2015), Thurn (2015), Fleming (2017), and Krutz (2017) for Holmes (2014) respectively; and
2. Four published research articles.

Due to the scope limitations of this research, I decided to focus mainly on the four published research articles for this stage of my literature review.

The first research article is written by Kenneth Kidd in 2004. It looks at how children and young adult literature can be analysed and explored both story and character-wise through theories of different psychoanalytic figures like Freud (e.g., connecting with unconscious phantasies and desires), Winnicott (e.g., space for play), and Klein (e.g., symbolisation). This article is published in a literature-aligned journal established by *John Hopkins University Press* named *The Lion and the Unicorn*, which is committed to ongoing discussion of literature for children (Project Muse, 2020). I found this paper illuminating for me as it connects with the exploration of stories and characters through the eyes of different psychoanalytic theories. This spoke to and reflected similar analysis and discussion work that I have done collectively with poetry, films, and short stories in various psychotherapeutic or psychoanalytic supervisory and learning groups. It was however curious to me that this illuminative and informative paper seemed to only be published in a journal of children’s literature, and I wondered about the possible bias and/or discrepancy with the importance of children and adult stories in (explorative) analysis.

The other three research articles are linked to more psychotherapeutic/psychoanalytic-inclined journals. One 2008 journal article by Hilary Hoge was published in *Psychoanalytic*

Dialogues. In this paper, Hoge looks at how to work with dreams and books in psychoanalysis, and illustrates this through case studies of clients who use books and dreams to process and explore what is happening for them. She also discusses how both dreams and books allow access to one's internal frame which may be protecting a deeper truth, and how both provide potential transitional spaces to allow play and exploration. This paper had me wondering what my internal frame was, what made up my frame, and what I might be unconsciously protecting myself from. I wondered if these aspects may come up for me in my heuristic research journey and felt encouraged with the notion of books being possible transitional spaces for play and exploration.

The next journal article Miller (2017) was published in the *British Journal of Psychotherapy*; and mainly looks at processing literature written by Samuel Beckett through the psychoanalytic lens of one- and two-person psychology. Miller ponders the position of the narrator and reader through ideas from Christopher Bollas and Wilfred Bion, putting forward the following ideas of perceptive identification by the reader, the evocative object, and how reading literature becomes a transitory containment space for the reader. Miller additionally posits that reading literature is "a similarly complex, if different aesthetic practice in conduct of psychoanalysis" (p. 458) and describes how this is so, i.e., through the interaction and presence of sensational experiences of words and therapy-work alongside the dynamics of words-and-reader and therapist-and-client. I felt that this article added to my understanding of how books and stories can provide a therapeutic space and the therapeutic holding (as a therapist would for a client), to allow one to think and explore the unknown and unconscious part of oneself.

The last journal article, published in *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, is by Emanuel Berman (2003) which looks at two art mediums – literature and film – and explores the interplay and dynamics of the reader and literature, viewer and film, through the notion of the psychoanalytic frame, transference, and interpretation. Through his paper, Berman describes the evolving potential transitional space between the artist, the work of art, and the readers/viewers; he also talks of the exploration of one's own subjective

experiences to art pieces where transference is considered “when art is perceived as a source of insight and growth”, countertransference is “when artists and their work are experienced as troubled patients”, and interpretation is considered “the striving to understand more deeply” (p. 122). Berman additionally speaks to how the transformation of a reader’s or viewer’s subjectivity takes place in the process of reading a book or watching a film – a process which may uncover unavoidable personal identifications and provoke positive, negative, and ambivalent emotional reactions. This postulation elaborates how stories and films can serve as imaginary analysts in helping us uncover our myths and fantasies, and underscore the painful process of discovering our own areas of blindness; both which are vital in improving self-analytic skills as well as aiding in one’s understanding of others. Examples of different figures’ subjective experiences of certain texts are also explored in Berman’s paper to demonstrate the ubiquity of subjective reactions in the critical exploration of literature and/or art. For me, this article bolsters more on the ideas written in Miller (2017). Berman’s article also resonates the most to me in terms of what I envisioned for my heuristic and discovery process of this particular dissertation.

As such, for my own research paper (and as mentioned in my Introduction Section), I have chosen to use a literary medium, i.e., a book called “*A Monster Calls*”, to experience and bring forth unknown parts of myself to a conscious knowing.

As described in my Introduction, “*A Monster Calls*” is a 2011 fiction book written by British-American author Patrick Ness, with its originating ideas from Siobhan Dowd, an Irish author who passed from cancer several years before the book published (Bird, 2011; Emanuel, 2019; Ness, 2020; The Siobhan Dowd Trust, 2016). I found myself curious as to whether any specific psychotherapeutic research has been done in relation to this book. I hence decided to search for articles in relation to this book, using the following terms in the Google search engine, the AUT Library search tool, and the *Psychoanalytic Electronic Publishing (PEP)* database search tool – ‘*A Monster Calls*’, ‘*A Monster Calls (book)*’ and these various key phrases: ‘*psychodynamic psychoanalysis research*’, ‘*psychodynamic psychoanalysis*’, ‘*psychotherapy*’, ‘*psychoanalysis*’. No results came up in *PEP* search, while

a range of articles appeared on Google search and AUT Library search – I will elaborate these below.

Through my search for articles for the book “*The Monster Calls*”, I came across general and philosophical review and analysis articles as well as a small number of published research articles. These array of articles were not only for the book (see Bird, 2011; Emanuel, 2019; Ridley, 2012 for reviews and analysis articles), but also for the film that was released in 2016 (see for reviews, analysis, and research articles Brody, 2017; Howlett, 2017; Maesya, 2018; Myers, 2017; Natedrake96, 2019; Sharp, 2018; Strauss, 2017) and for the theatre show run that started in 2018 (see Cavendish, 2018; Taylor, 2018). As there are plot and character changes in the film and play as well as both being comparatively more visually experiential and interpretative mediums (Calderon, 2016; McCambridge, 2017; Pavelski, 2016; Rogers, 2017), I decided to focus solely on the literary book as the main medium in this dissertation and its related articles. To maintain some research vigor, I further narrowed down my research literature focus to only published research articles written about the book “*The Monster Calls*”.

As such, I found seven published articles through the abovementioned criteria process. The first is Jen Aggleton’s (2017) paper which explores the book “*A Monster Calls*” in a more structural level with its study of the impact of illustrations on the reading experience. This paper, along with the next two papers, connect with the field of children’s literature and education. The second paper in this category, Yarova (2019), uses the characters of the book “*The Monster Calls*” to explore the interconnectedness of humans and environment, and how this can be used to educate children on their environmental awareness and our connection with nature. The third, written by Kevin Sun in 2018, also espouses lessons that can be learned by children, by looking at the monster symbolism used in three different books, one of which is “*A Monster Calls*”; it also looks at how such symbolism can offer children a tool to learn from a well of adult wisdom and overcome what may be horrifying and painful for them. This paper by Kevin Sun provided me with some underlying understanding that the heuristic journey that I was to embark on myself would most likely

bring me into contact with experiences that may be too horrible or painful for me as a child and also as an adult.

The fourth and fifth papers were both written by Nishan Ghosal and Paul Wilkinson; one of which is an earlier short reflection piece written in 2017. Their full paper, written in 2019, uses the protagonist Conor in “*A Monster Calls*” to look at the portrayal of dissociation in childhood bereavement, stating how his way of coping (disassociation and disconnection) was maladaptive due to the lack of supportive figures and how his behaviour reflects a dissociative episode instead of a psychotic one. Their 2017 reflection piece, however, does not use the word maladaptive, instead saying that the protagonist’s dissociative experience is “an engaging example of how feelings of disconnect can act as a coping mechanism during times of emotional trauma.” (p. 309). Both authors are from the field of clinical medicine with their articles appearing in more medically based journals, i.e., *Child and Adolescent Mental Health* for the published paper, and *The British Journal of Psychiatry* for the reflection piece. I found the discrepancies of their two pieces of writing rather disconcerting, and wondered what happened for the researchers and writers from 2017 to 2019 where they had initially seen Conor’s behaviour as a valid coping mechanism to emotional trauma, to labelling Conor’s way of coping as maladaptive.

In contrast, the last two papers Day (2012) and Carlin (2017) both explore how we can use the book “*A Monster Calls*” to explore and learn about how young people grieve. Day (2012) explores this by relating what the protagonist Conor is experiencing to each step in Kübler-Ross’ “*Five Stages of Grief*” and mentions caveats of using this generally in palliative care while pondering whether children and teenagers experience grief differently to adults. Day’s article was published in *Medical Humanities* in the *BMJ Journals*, one of the oldest peer-reviewed general medical journals. For me, this paper leaned heavily into the grief themes of the book “*The Monster Calls*” which was something I wanted to keep in mind for my work research journey but also wanted to hold gently to because there was a part of me which felt the importance of staying open to other possible themes that may arise for me in my heuristic journey. I also found this paper insightful with the wondering of how children

may grieve differently to adults - would this apply to adults wanting to get in touch with the possible different parts of one's self including their child self within? I did not feel fully certain of this and wondered if my research journey might add anything to this.

The last paper written by Carlin (2017) uses Sigmund Freud's postulations on dreams as well as biblical lessons from the life of Jesus to offer a psychoanalytic and theological analysis of the three smaller stories mentioned in the book "*The Monster Calls*" and what may be happening for the protagonist Conor. This article is published in *Pastoral Psychology* in *SpringerLink*. With this paper, I felt the explorations could have been separated into two different papers, that is, one paper focusing solely on a psychoanalytic analysis and a second paper written solely from theological analysis. This may have allowed deeper exploration from two different viewpoints. As it is, with how the paper is written, both viewpoints seem to have their separate sections anyhow. With the portion written using Freud's theories on dreams, I found this helped with my own understanding of the three smaller stories within the book "*The Monster Calls*", its impact on Conor, as well as Conor's reactions and responses.

It occurred to me that none of the articles elaborated above are written from the in-depth experiential position of the researcher. This calls to a gap in research in terms of using the book "*The Monster Calls*" to explore parts of self. I would therefore like to explore this literary book using the heuristic methodology of immersion, indwelling, self-reflection, self-dialogue, and tacit knowing, to learn about myself as a person and as a therapist who is ever-learning.

Section 3: Methodology and Method

This section has been divided mainly into three subsections. I will provide a *Prologue*, which explains the underlying method and methodology of what I was already unknowingly doing and its alignment with heuristic research; a *Skeletal Frame(work)*, which elaborates the origins of heuristic research, the different phases and processes as defined mainly by Moustakas (1990) and Sela-Smith (2002), and examples of how I went about doing this; and an *Ethics and Caveats*, which elaborates and informs my position as a researcher for this heuristic research journey through three different stances.

I. *Prologue – Unknowing*

After my summer read of the book “*The Monster Calls*”, I did wonder at various ways of how I could conduct my research with the book. I knew I wanted to explore the book and its apparent predominant theme of grief. There was just uncertainty in myself as to what angle to go for and what methodology to use. Some ideas that had come up for me with regards to the angles I could research in included: exploring grief in relation to specific grief-related theories like Kübler-Ross & Kessler’s *Five Stages of Grieving* (2005) or Freud’s (1917) *Mourning and Melancholia*; exploring grief in relation to existential-related postulations like Yalom’s (1980) four ultimate existential concerns or Frankl’s (2006) search of meaning; using the book’s protagonist Conor as an imaginary client experiencing grief and working through how I may work with him as a therapist; exploring grief through the lens of theories of Winnicott, Bion, and/or Bowlby as these are theorists I have found most helpful in shaping how I work with clients thus far; and looking at grief from a cross-cultural lens due to my position as an Southeast Asian therapist and person working in the social and cultural landscape that is Aotearoa New Zealand. I also wondered at the various methodologies I could possibly use to shape my research and how that would fit with the ideas I had thought of, e.g., hermeneutic research or literature review, case study analysis, systemic analysis, heuristic literature review, and of course, heuristic self-enquiry.

As more ideas filtered through from within myself and from the people I discussed my thoughts and the literary book with, e.g. peers, supervisors, mentors, friends; I started feeling rather lost in all the potential research possibilities and avenues. What do I want as my research question?

After some time feeling lost, I decided to settle my many trains of thoughts by focusing on that exact question and sitting in the messiness to see what may come up or speak to me more. Doing this and with the help of my academic supervisor, I started to realise that what truly intrigued me was the intensity of emotions that came up for me while reading the book, as well as why and how that may be so. I also started realising that the way I had naturally gone about my process at that point already closely aligned with Moustakas' (1990) heuristic methodology where I followed my intuition, self-reflected, stepped away (incubated), stayed with enquiring curiosity in the haze and lostness, and made notes of my explorative journey in a journal. I was already in the stage of what Moustakas describes as *Initial Engagement*. With this in mind, I decided to continue on with my introspective process by choosing to use the heuristic methodology to explore the possible hidden or unconscious or split-off parts of myself by immersing myself deeply into the book “*The Monster Calls*”. I figured that seeing the story is of a child losing his mother to cancer, this heuristic exploration could potentially help me learn and understand how I hold myself generally, perhaps in the face of grief or in relation to grief; or perhaps help me connect with how I experience grief (and/or may have experienced grief) and the biases that I may have because of that. It may be interesting to note that at this stage of my research process, I was seemingly more focused on my preconceived ideas and connotation of the word “grief”, where the most dominant feature in my mind at the time had been the idea of losing someone or something precious to death or life circumstances. Somehow, this did not feel very fleshed out and I remember feeling a strong curiosity to discover more, especially given my strong reactions to the book “*The Monster Calls*”.

II. *The Skeletal Frame(work)*

I have approached this research from an interpretive paradigm as it is based on my subjective experience of the book (Grant & Giddings, 2002). The approach I have taken is a combination of heuristic research methods and process stated by Moustakas (1990) and Sela-Smith (2002) in that I embraced Moustakas’ phases of heuristic research and Sela-Smith’s focus on the self (also known as heuristic self-enquiry).

According to Moustakas (1990), the word *heuristic* is derived from the Greek word *heuriskein*, which means “to discover” or “to find”. Moustakas describes it as “a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of the experience and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis” (p. 9). It is also one form of research where the self of the researcher is present through the whole process, holding an openness to the discovery process and allowing for growing self-awareness and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon and the researcher’s self. The philosophy of heuristic research has strong links to the humanistic tradition, which espouses theories and assertions from figures such as Rene Descartes (*I am, I exist*), Abraham Maslow (on self-actualisation), Sidney Jourard (on self-disclosure), Michael Polanyi (on tacit dimension, indwelling, knowing and being), Martin Buber (on dialogue explorations and mutuality), and Carl Rogers (on human science) (Moustakas, 1990).

Moustakas’ (1990) heuristic research phases are as follows:

1. **Initial Engagement**

- a) This is the stage where I discovered my research question and figured which research methodology was best for me through tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling, focusing, self-dialogue, and self-reflection.

■ *Definitions:*

i. *Tacit knowing*

This is the capacity that allows one to sense, recognize, and know of something from the understanding or experiencing of separate individual parts (Moustakas, 1990; Polanyi, 1964; Polanyi, 1969; Polanyi, 1983).

This can be described as “*implicit knowing*” (Moustakas, 1990). For example, this includes recognising someone’s face, reading the mood of a person, or knowing the essence, shape, and understanding of a tree (Polanyi, 1964, 1983; Moustakas, 1990). According to Douglass & Moustakas (1985) and Moustakas (1990), tacit knowing is a fundamental capacity of the self of the researcher which bears forth hunches and indistinct amorphous insights which defines heuristic discoveries.

ii. *Intuition*

This capacity can be described as the bridge between explicit observable and describable knowledge and tacit implicit knowledge (Moustakas, 1990). Through careful observation of parts, we can connect all these parts with intuition to form, see, discover, and understand patterns, relationships, and inferences (Moustakas, 1990).

iii. *Indwelling*

This can be defined as the heuristic process of consciously and deliberately turning and looking inwards to attentively and unwaveringly gaze into an aspect of one’s human experience so as to more fully and deeply comprehend the meaning or nature of such an experience (Moustakas, 1990). According to Moustakas, this process is not linear or logical, instead allowing for one to attune and follow thoughts, feelings, and impressions that arises. It also requires one to remain with the quality of human experience being explored, returning to it repeatedly until one is able to express and illustrate the said experience through words or works of art (Moustakas, 1990). This illustrates the vigorousness of the process.

iv. *Focusing*

This process in heuristic research involves “*the clearing of an inward space*” to create a relaxed and receptive self-state which then permits one

to tap into thoughts and feelings, enables perceptions and sensings essential for clarification, and allows one to set aside and remove “*clutter*”, in order to attend to and stay with a continual process of systematically coming into contact with the more central meanings and insights of an experience (Moustakas, 1990).

v. *Self-dialogue*

This is a process of examining one’s experience by entering into an open, honest, receptive, and attuned back-and-forth questioning with one’s self and experiences until meanings and understandings are discovered. This seeks to allow for more understanding of possible hidden patterns of experiences and its wholeness in a more scientifically systematic and disciplined way. (Moustakas, 1990).

vi. *Self-reflection*

For this research, I have defined this as a process of observing, evaluating, and exploring one’s thoughts, feelings, and behaviour with interest and curiosity in order to understand who one is, what one’s values are, and why one thinks, feels, and acts the way they do.

(Cambridge, n.d.; Davis, 2021; Habash, 2018)

- b) As previously mentioned in my Introduction Section and in my *Prologue* at the start of this chapter, I had naturally and unknowingly started on this stage of the heuristic research process by allowing myself free reign in using all the aforementioned “tools” of tacit knowing, intuition, indwelling, focusing, self-dialogue, and self-reflection to find the research area and question I am to explore in this paper; as well as the methodology that best fitted with me, my research process, and my research goals.

2. Immersion

- a) In this phase, one main process I undertook was diving into the pages of the book and dwelling deeply in the experiences, thoughts, feelings, and associations that it brought up for me.
- b) The deep immersion in the book was done by reading each book chapter thoroughly three times. Due to the intensity of the book on me emotionally, psychologically, and mentally, I felt that reading each chapter three times would be more manageable for me than reading the whole book thoroughly three times.
- c) During each reading round of each individual chapter, I documented on paper and on my computer all the feelings, thoughts, associations, and experiences that came up for me as part of my dissertation journal (i.e., method of journaling).
- d) Another main process I did before going into the book was staying intensely with my research question and the *idea* of immersing myself in the book (the reason for this will be elaborated in the Results Section); and jotted down on paper or in my computer the experiences, thoughts, feelings, and awareness that arose for me in this process.
- e) Through this phase and for both main processes here, I used the heuristic enquiry tools of self-dialogue, self-reflection, self-searching, tacit knowing, indwelling, focusing, and intuition.
- f) Much time was spent on this section due to the intensity of each chapter read and what came up for me emotionally, psychologically, and mentally. The results of these will be elaborated in the Results Section.

3. Incubation

- a) This is a process which can be defined by me moving out of and taking time away from intensely being-with or dwelling-in my research question and the full immersion of the book, as well as my experiences from both, to allow for underlying knowings to bubble out of myself.

- b) This can be likened to shorter periods of walking away from focused writing and experiencing to take a long shower, watch a movie, or have a good meal; or longer periods of parking and stepping away from the immersive thinking, feeling, and sensing process to go for long walks and other nature experiences, or to work on a clinical assignment instead – this are things that I have done in order to mostly aid in my heuristic process of this research.
- c) According to Moustakas (1990), when the intensity of needing to be immersed in something is removed, growth and further understanding would arise during those moments.
- d) During this process of incubation, self-dialogue, self-reflection, intuition, and tacit knowing remains important (Moustakas, 1990).

4. Illumination

- a) According to Moustakas (1990), this process can happen at any time during the heuristic research process. It is said that new awareness and new understandings of how things may connect with each other as well as of my own internal frame of reference may arise.
- b) In my heuristic research process, this has happened at various times of my sitting-with and being with the materials, and the various states and experiences I have found myself in; during the full immersion of the book "*The Monster Calls*"; and during the periods of incubation. All these will be elaborated in the Results Chapter of this paper.
- c) Self-dialogue, self-searching, intuition, and tacit knowing play a key role in these moments (Moustakas, 1990).

5. Explication

- a) In this phase, I would fully examine what has come up for me through my experience of approaching the book again and immersing deeply in the book, as

well as investigate the different layers of meaning in order to discover the core themes and elements that have come up for me.

- b) This is the meaning-making part of my research and will utilize “focusing, indwelling, self-searching, and self-disclosure” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 18).
- c) In my heuristic research process, I have done some of this as I journaled along, and this will be done more fully during the Results and Discussion Sections of this paper.

6. Creative synthesis

- a) This phase can be described as me narrating and expressing my findings, understandings, and experiences as a whole; as well as how it has been, through a demonstrative creative form.
- b) Accordingly, writing and creatively crafting this research paper would be my creative synthesis.
- c) For this stage, focusing, tacit knowing, intuition, self-reflection, and self-dialogue remains important (Moustakas, 1990).

III. *Ethics and Caveats – The Researcher’s Position*

In this section, I am highlighting the stances present within myself as well as those I have taken as a researcher for this dissertation, and the external factors that have affected this research and my journey through it.

First Stance

I am a female, cis-gendered, Southeast Asian individual who has grown up in two South East Asian countries, both of which were historically colonised by the British. I was English educated from my early years through to university. Twelve years ago, I migrated to Aotearoa New Zealand to make this country my home. I offer this information into my background as it provides what Moustakas (1990) describes an internal frame of reference

into me as a researcher – this is pertinent given that for this heuristic research, I am looking and delving into a book written by an English-American author, based on ideas from an Irish author, and which is about a 13-year-old male protagonist in seemingly English based settings.

In my wondering of how come I find myself drawn to such a book for heuristic research, and through much introspection and reflection, I have come to realise that the English based settings, which I had been unconsciously drawn to, provided a two-fold function.

One, it provided a familiar enough landscape for me to recognise and navigate my mental, emotional, psychological, and intrapsychic journey in this research. This came from having grown up in predominantly British-colonised countries, being educated at an English mission school, and having read a library worth of Enid Blyton, Roald Dahl, and Agatha Christie books. The imaginative imagery of such English based settings had been a mental and literary playground for me growing up, and I knew enough of it to feel its familiarity and find a sense of home within it.

The second function of the English based settings was that it allowed for some space and distance in my exploration of self. If the protagonist had been female or/and Asian, it would have felt too close and too difficult for me to navigate due to overly intense identification.

Second Stance

Through the period that this research was done in, I started working at a holistic hospice, first as a psychotherapy student on placement, and then as a psychotherapy practitioner on the completion of my clinical papers. My work at this hospice sees me engaging and being with clients who are going through the process of slowly losing someone or having recently lost someone to disease, as well as clients who may be dying and wondering how to live their lives in the limited time they have left. Themes of grief, loss, and death are prevalent through my work here – themes similarly being explored in this

research. It could be said that working at the hospice impacted my research process emotionally, psychologically, and mentally by further immersing me in similarly themed topics and experiences, which at times increased the intensity of emotions I felt through my research process, making an already challenging process even more so.

That said, I have also found that through this time, my research process has helped inform my clinical practice in enriching ways, and that my work with clients has helped me put into place and make sense of various aspects that have arisen for me in my research process. Because of this and in order to keep with the ethics of this paper and with client confidentiality, I will only focus on my process and my learnings from my clinical work and this research when writing this paper.

Third Stance

The third stance I will elaborate on is an external factor that has affected the world as a whole. I place this here as it has and still is changing and affecting me and the rest of the world, tapping into what Carl Jung described as the “*collective unconscious*”, or simply the shared unconscious mind of all (Jung, 1991).

As such, an important factor to consider for this research is that it has been mostly undertaken during an unprecedented worldwide pandemic event. As an individual living in Aotearoa New Zealand, the effects of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic discernibly started on March 2020 (Strongman, 2021). This affected me and my research progress and process as I, along with people around me locally and globally, attempted to collectively make sense and deal with what was happening. Seemingly overnight, what were previously “normal” life experiences and activities such as air travel, working at the office or being at university, having a meal at a restaurant, and meeting and connecting with loved ones face-to-face, were halted as we in Aotearoa New Zealand (along with everyone all over the world) went into stay-at-home lockdowns. Through various news and social media channels, we saw the rapid and vast infection spreads through numerous countries; the frighteningly high death rates; and the breakdown of health systems, facilities, and practitioners pushed to, and

for some, over their limits. There seemed to be a sense of huge collective shock and grief over the losses and changes worldwide, as the people including myself watched the devastation the virus wrecked (for more reading on Covid-19 and its collective impact, please refer to Berinato, 2020; Burton, 2021; Hyder, 2020; Neely et al., 2021; Stanford Medicine, 2022; Weir, 2020). Personally, I felt myself grappling with the uncertainty, shock, fear, and helplessness from the massive loss of lives and the breakdown of presumed “structures” and systems – at this point, I had to pause my research process into the book for a period of time in order to process what was happening around me.

At the point of writing this, it has since been eighteen months, and COVID-19 and its effects on our lives are still very much present and ongoing. Life feels different. We have watched the different ways various world governments approached handling the pandemic, some with distressingly heart-breaking consequences. There have been more lockdowns, with the most recent one in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland) starting in August 2021 due to the rise and spread of the more infectious Delta variant of coronavirus (Corlett, 2021; New Zealand Doctor, 2022). There has also been new physical measures and mandates introduced like wearing masks, maintaining a 2m distance from others, scanning the Covid Tracer App etc (refer to New Zealand Government, n.d., and New Zealand Government, 2022 for more information); as well as a rise in conspiracy theories and misinformation on social media and amongst pockets of people with regards to the vaccines and lockdowns (read more from Broughton, 2020; Dirga, 2021; Dacombe, 2021; Farrier, 2021).

Navigating the new “normal” in daily life and this research during this time has been challenging, and I have had to pause my research process several times in order to manage the physical and emotional disruptions that arose for me each time a lockdown occurred. I had found that at each lockdown event, the sudden restrictive changes would disrupt my sense of stability and safety, while increasing the pressure of my living, working, researching, and processing from home. At one point, I questioned the practicality of doing my research on going into potentially more grief by delving heuristically into the book “*The Monster Calls*”, especially when grief was already seemingly all around me. Admittedly, I found it at

times intensely and emotionally challenging to create capacity within myself for my research into potentially more grief. And yet, my heuristic journey remained something that I felt I needed to pursue for myself and for my practice as a psychotherapist. In choosing to continue doing this research, I decided that I would use my experiences of living through the pandemic to help inform my research and my processes as well. I perceived that what will be evoked for me through my research process – the feelings, sensings, thoughts, associations, imageries – may be amplified. Because of this, I determined that the allowance of some time and space for grounding, self-care, thinking, reflection, and meaning making was important and would need to take precedence for me in my research process.

Section 4: Results – Illuminations and Explications

As this is a heuristic self-study, this section will elaborate on the journey of my research process in segments, along the sensings, thoughts, feelings, and imagery that were evoked for me. It will also include my journaled associations, illuminations, and meaning making links (i.e., initial and further explications) that arose for me, and which have helped me make sense of my research processing and journey so far. This section has three main chapters which will immerse you, the reader, into my heuristic journey and processes from *Before*, *During*, and *After* my heuristic immersion into the book “*The Monster Calls*”.

Chapter 1 – Approaching the rabbit hole

In this chapter, I will elaborate on the process, evocations, illuminations, learnings, and meaning-making that came through for me from the stages *before* I started deeply immersing myself into the book “*The Monster Calls*”. This will extend from after my first casual read of “*The Monster Calls*”, to during the writing of my research proposal, to the space I found myself in before I started my immersion into the literary book.

Part 1

Wordlessness..

On deciding to immerse myself heuristically in the book “*The Monster Calls*”, I had turned my mind to figuring out how to capture most, if not all, of my thoughts and ideas to draft my research proposal. My body was filled with excitement and nervousness, my mind was filled with rich imagery and ideas as I contemplated what I thought could be a journey into the unknown and perhaps grief – possibly my own? I wondered – through immersing myself deeply into the book. I was journaling all that I was feeling and thinking at that time. Words flowed from my hands, as they tried to catch up with the stream of thoughts and images I saw and sensed coming through my mind’s eye.

Yet, I started to notice something strange – every time I was asked what my research was about, I found myself lost for words. My tongue felt like it was in knots and I found myself struggling to give voice to, to verbalise, the rich imagery and ideas that filled in my mind. I could see them, I could feel them – I just could not speak of them. I felt silenced, as though there was a large block between my mouth and my mind's eye. I sat with this, thinking it may pass. The longer I sat with and pondered on this, the more frustrated I felt with not being able to convey to others what I was dreaming up and crafting in my mind; and soon I started feeling dread when asked what my research would be and what it may entail. In slowing my experience and contemplating the state I was in, I came to notice the following – people would ask about my research; excited with the thoughts and ideas in my head, I want to speak but nothing seems to connect; I try to wrangle within myself a way to form what I would like to say; after some struggling where my mind starts going blank, no words come to my mouth; I am left sitting in frustrated silence and all I can say is "I am not sure yet". The one time I pushed myself to verbalise something more, I noticed a disconnect between my thoughts, my body, and what I was saying. It was almost as though I was watching another person speak. The words, ideas, thoughts I managed to express were sparse and sporadic; they also sounded hollow and dry, dull and flat. I had disassociated and I was not sure why.

Figure 2*“Silenced”*

Note. This is a photo of my own crayon artwork depicting the block and struggle for verbalisation.

It was during this time where I also noticed that the only time my block for words and the disconnect was relieved, was during my regular academic supervision sessions. In those sessions, I felt support and understanding for my work as well as the state I was in. Soon, I realised that it was during times where the person with me was themselves emotionally real, authentic, and vulnerable, that I found myself able to finally connect through the block to my thoughts, ideas, and underlying emotions that I was carrying. It was as though their presence allowed and helped me break through the block within myself; that seeing and being with the emotional realness and vulnerability of someone whom I trust shone a light on similar emotions that I was feeling myself. I felt that I was not alone, and that it was ok for things to be as unknown and convolutedly messy as it was. It occurred to me that this could be

described by Winnicott’s theory of holding whereby the presence and experiences of a trusted other unconsciously melded with mine and provided a safe transitional psychological place where I could gather and make sense of my unknown disconnected parts (Ogden, 2004; Winnicott, 1945, 1953). This could also be described by Bion’s theory of containment, where another person was able to provide the space and the “alpha (or α)-function” to help me to mentalise, think through, and make sense of my floating, unconscious, tumultuous “beta (or β)-elements” (Bell, 2013; Brown, 2012; Bion, 1962b; Ogden, 2004). Perhaps it was both. A part of me wondered here if the experience of wordlessness and then breaking through the block with the help and support of a containing other could be me accessing or revisiting a past (grief?) experience from my child self, i.e., experiences I had when I was a young child and/or baby. I made notes of this in my journal and kept this in mind as I continued on with my research journey.

Part 2

Viva la Resistance..

From feeling stickily stuck in a place where I felt internally silenced and blocked to noticing the rays that broke through that haze, I then noticed myself moving to a place where I hugely avoided the book “*The Monster Calls*” – I noted that I literally hid the book under stacks of other books, symbolically burying it away. This stage happened starting from when the pandemic began making itself known to the world, and I felt as though I could not bear to look into more possible grief when it was seemingly already all around me. Instead, over a period of several months, the book was placed aside and I found myself gravitating and connecting to movies, music, the news of what was happening with the world, dreams and imagery that came up in reverie, and my processes from client work. These, I found, were what helped me connect with the different shades and shapes of (potentially grief related) emotions that I was already feeling from the effects and changes brought on by the Covid pandemic in Aotearoa New Zealand, from what was happening around the world, and from the *idea* of reading the book. As noted in my journal, this period was filled with an ocean of

tears on my part as I felt a tremendous amount of fear, sadness, anger, and frustration during this time.

a) *The movies..*

Through this period, I started to notice the underlying unconscious tones and themes of the movies I seemingly naturally gravitated to for viewing. I had superficially picked most of these movies based on them being classed as comedies and/or fantasy and hence thought they would be appropriately light-hearted viewing. Yet in watching them, I find myself caught off guard each time with how much grief and loss were intertwined in their stories – in each, there seemed to be one or more character/s who had passed on or who was lost, with the story thread being the main and peripheral character/s grieving or trying to comprehend this loss. These included the animation movie “*Coco*” and “*Soul*”; various TV series like “*Never Have I Ever*”, “*WandaVision*”, and episodes of “*Station 19*”; and other movies like “*This Is Where I Leave You*”, “*Bicentennial Man*”, and “*Big Fish*”. I remember feeling exasperated and yet curious upon realising that I had delved into the worlds on screen as a means to escape my emotions and my reality with what was happening around me; and yet somehow, the films and shows I had unconsciously chosen to view ironically connected me with what I was wanting to run from. Watching each one brought up a lot for me – there were tears of sadness and anger; flashes of memories and a remembering of significant people in my life leaving at various points; self-recognition of my feeling misunderstood, dismissed, ignored, and silenced by those who were supposed to help and guide me (at that time and from past experiences); and a longing to break free from it all but feeling trapped and helpless at being unable to.

b) *The dream*

There was a significant dream portion amid this period which I remembered and had jotted down in my dissertation journal. I was sitting on a long wooden picnic bench with someone I had once been close to in my early schooling years. There were other people along

the picnic bench and around us, but I did not recognise any of them. We were all at a green grassy open area overlooking several tall white buildings, and autumn coloured tree leaves were floating down around us. Books and papers were strewn along the benches – we were studying out in the open. I had been telling my friend about something that had been going on with me, but I soon realised she had not heard a thing I said. I glanced away from her and noticed one of my mentors walking under the trees close to the white buildings with a familiar-looking woman who reminded me of Whoopi Goldberg. I wanted to wave to them but did not. Instead, I gestured, mentioned their presence to my friend, and said they have a history. What do you mean? my friend asked. I only repeated myself, they have a history. I then felt a pull to write down some research ideas that popped in my head (lest I forgot them) and started anxiously looking for paper to write on. But I could not find any available or free paper space anywhere – every sheet of paper I came across were filled to the edges with scribbles and writings, which I soon realised was my own. I then woke up.

In vocalising and exploring of this dream in supervision and therapy, I realised that it connected to my feeling of needing more containment during this time, as well as space to express myself the way I need to. There had been instances during this period where I had felt missed and misunderstood in my waking life, e.g., cancelled prearrangements, interactions which were incongruent and/or dismissive, and the feeling of anxiety and pressured by the constraints of the academic structure that I was to write my research in.

Through exploring this dream in what I felt were safe spaces, I found that I was then able to give voice to my need for consistent and regular presence from various key people in my life and ask them for this possibility. With their consent and agreement, I was able to put in place more support and (external) containment for myself in my research journey. Feeling steadier (as well as feeling the pressure of time constraints on the research), I decided to start looking at the book "*The Monster Calls*" so as to start my deep immersion into the book. Yet, the resistance I felt was still strong. I wanted to run, throw or move the book away, and I would find myself averting my eyes away from seeing it. Some days, the best I could do

was to sit and stare at the pile of books and papers where the book was buried. My body (and mind) did not want to remove the book from its burial site just yet.

c) *The music..*

Intertwined through this time with the movies, the dream, and me trying to place the book “*The Monster Calls*” in front of me, I found myself drawn to and enamoured with various songs. I noticed that these would be songs from movies or shows I watched, e.g., a version of “*Remember Me*”, sung by a little boy to his catatonic great grandmother from the animation “*Coco*”; songs I may have heard before and could only remember a beat or some lyrics to, e.g., Teeks and Hollie Smith’s version of “*Whakaaria Mai (How Great Thou Art)*”; songs that may pop into my head at a random point, e.g., “*Dream*” by Priscilla Ahn; and songs that I may feel a spontaneous yearning to listen to, e.g., Andy Williams’ version of “*Moon River*”, and “*I’ll Keep You Safe*” by Sleeping At Last. I will not explicitly go through each and every song here, what each brought up for me, and what I learned from them specifically, as that could be a whole separate research paper altogether, and it is also beyond the scope of my current research topic. Instead, what I will elaborate on is my general noticings, sensings, illuminations, and my overall process of how and what the music and songs evoked and brought out for me during this period of grappling and resistance.

One of my noticings and sensings on listening to music I stumbled upon or gravitated towards during this stage was how each song or music piece seemingly reached through any intrapsychic armour I may have consciously or unconsciously conjured up, to touch and connect to the deeper underlying parts of myself that I may be protecting, parts that I may be avoiding or ignoring, parts I may have been blind to, and how I may really be. The imagery that came to mind with listening to each song was of its lyrics, melodies, and tones wrapping themselves around me like a warm snug blanket. With the snug embrace, it felt as though the delicate tendrils of the musical piece penetrated through the cavernous depths with sly ease and resonated with something deeply buried within myself, connecting me with a well of raw emotions and memories.

As such, I realised that the way most of my experiences with music flowed in this phase of my research process allowed me to notice, sense, feel, sit, and commune with the child in me. On listening to various songs, I first found myself crying tears which felt as though they stemmed from deep within myself. The rawness and intensity of the tears would seem to tire me, making me feel physically drained. After a while, amongst the music and tears, I started feeling an immense amount of anger. In wondering and being in these moments of swirling emotions, I found myself intermittently remembering, feeling into, and seeing in my mind's eye numerous memories from my childhood. This included feeling into the sadness and anger towards the absence and loss of my main parental figures from when I was baby till I was three; the anguish I felt and the futility of the tantrums I threw in being forcibly relocated from the warm, loving, familiar home of my early years, filled with caring caregivers, animals, and nature spaces I had strongly attached to, to a space filled with unfamiliar strangeness and unknownness which after some time morphed with a strong thread of absences, punishing coldness, imposition, and volatility; of feeling trapped, wanting to be free, and a desire to dissolve into myself by becoming ephemeral wisps of smoke so as to disappear and escape.

Part 3

Evolving positions..

It was going through the above experiential stages that allowed me to realise how much of what I was exploring in my research was bounded deep in my past and deeply rooted within me. It was here that I wondered if perhaps my research question and enquiry could be even more focused on using the book “*The Monster Calls*” to explore the knowns and unknowns of what I was at that time able to finally name as my *grief landscape*.

I pondered, sat with, and discussed my thoughts of the evolution of my research process over a few supervision sessions. During a session, it was suggested to me that perhaps my research was looking at more than just grief, in that my research journey could encompass other explorable avenues like love, fear, longing, or loss. That suggestion allowed

me to discern my bias and one of my blind spots, i.e., I had been too engrossed on my research being on grief and so had been looking at all that came up for me solely through the lens of grief. This meant I may have unknowingly restricted my heuristic process and may have missed a few things or potential nuances along the way. With new openness and a freer position in mind, I decided to shift my grief lenses away and see where my heuristic process of intuition and focusing took me.

Part 4

Unfolding reverie..

a) Adaptation

After shifting to a freer stance and following on from my research process above, I continued tracking where my memories took me. By this time, the book “*The Monster Calls*” had been unburied from its bookish tomb and now sat unopened on my table a few millimetres away from me. I tried to open its pages once and found myself instinctively slamming it shut. Feeling exasperated with my resistance, I decided to also look to what I was doing in place of reading the book.

In both tracking my memories and observing what I unconsciously gravitated to doing in place of reading the book, I started to slowly realise that I was reconnecting and remembering how I used to soothe myself as a child growing up. This included *spending time amongst nature and animals* – as a young child, I would observe and play around my childhood home where there were green grass, trees, streams, rain-collecting pots, and animals such as pet pigeons, baby farmbirds, cats, turtles, and terrapins; *watching my favourite films and shows* like “*Beauty and the Beast*”, “*Looney Tunes*”, “*Hook*”, and “*Beetlejuice*”; *eating food* – Asian noodle dishes and Milo were my go-to; *reading mostly fantasy and children’s fiction* – Enid Blyton and Roald Dahl were authors of worlds I enjoyed immersing myself in; *music* – listening to the radio, singing aloud, and silly dancing with my older sibling was a favourite past time; *dreams and sleep* – dreams offered endless possibilities of what, who, and how I could be, while sleep felt like a refuge.

Noticing and realising all the different above-mentioned soothing ways has helped me comprehend and appreciate that each can be imagined as a basic building cube of an adaptive defence that I tried as a young child and soon incorporated as a part of my intrapsychic self and unconscious being over the years. Each was a means of escape or adapting to a situation I could not change or control as a child. These included situations filled with unfamiliar strangeness, unpredictability, and restrictiveness; situations I would not have chosen for myself and which I felt forcibly put in by the adults in my life, e.g., relocations, getting rid of a treasured disabled pet, an almost autocratic focus on academics with little or no allowance for play or active movement; and the uncontrolled inevitable loss of attachments which also encompassed my older sibling leaving home when I was eight – I had never really realised the enormity and the impact of this particular loss on me until this research process.

b) Fear of breakdown

Alongside this period of coming into comprehension of my adaptive mechanisms, I also had two significant reverie imageries.

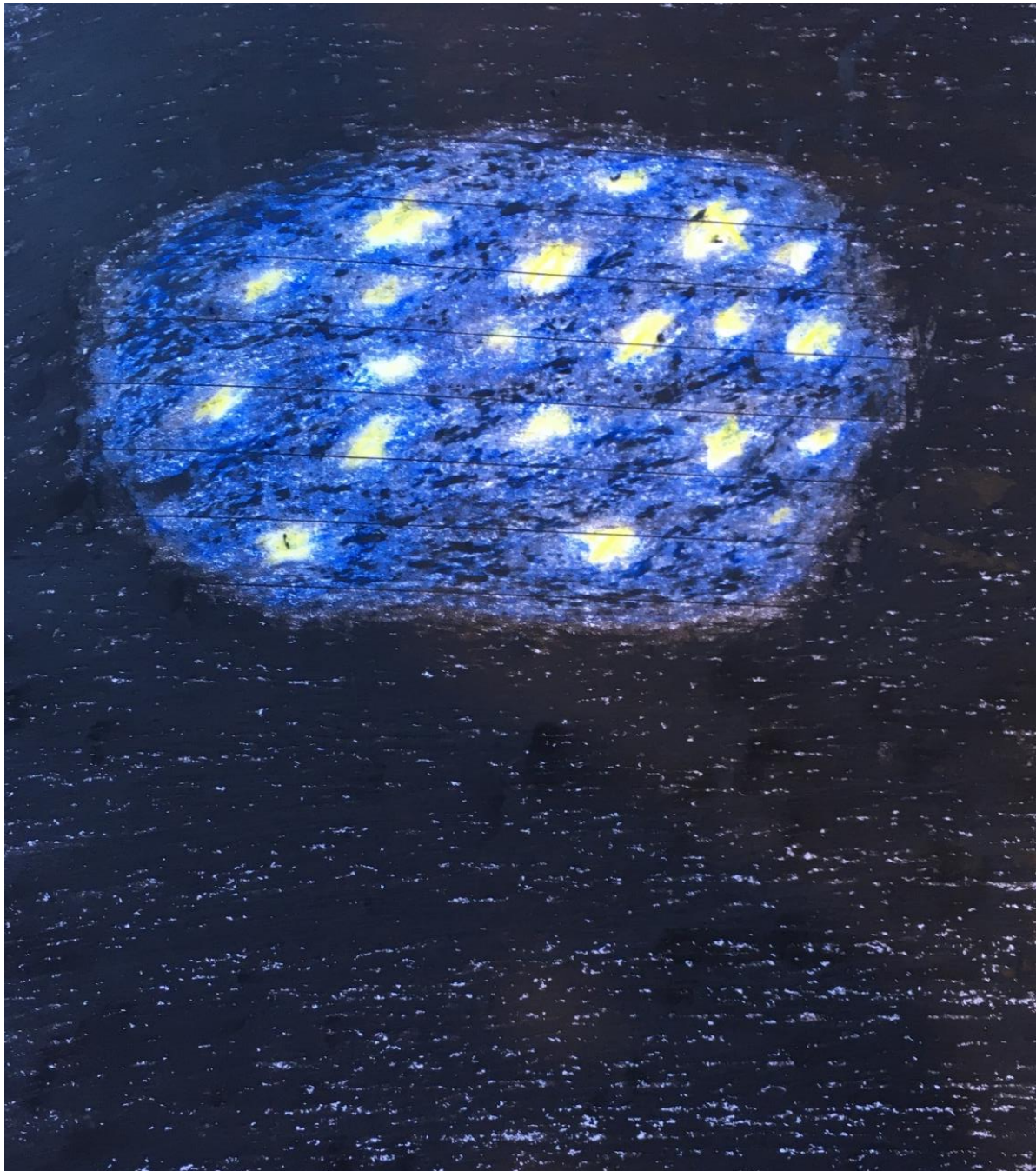
In the first, I am walking along what seem to be a relatively open grounded path in a wooded area. I am lost and unsure of where I am going. The moon is out, throwing its light on me and the trees arounds me. I feel a slight breeze on my face and notice the dark shadowy silhouettes of the trees and their dancing leaves. I start to feel nervous, wondering what may jump out of the shadows at me. I feel the uneven ground undulated by tree roots through my shoes, and the crunch of leaves and twigs with each step I take. I stop and realise, I cannot hear a sound. Not the rustling of dancing tree leaves, not the crunching of the twigs underfoot, not the chattering calls of nocturnal animals, not the soft whisper of the breeze.. there is only silence. I feel my heartbeat quicken as I realise, I am alone; no one is there, no one knows I am there – there is no one to help me or save me. Panicked, I open my mouth to scream; perhaps someone would hear me. There is only silence. I sit myself down

on the uneven ground under a tree, wrap my arms around my knees, and feel a chill in my bones.

The scene changes and I am in my second reverie imagery. In this one, I am sitting on relative smooth ground, with my arms wrapped around my knees. I am surrounded by black shadowy darkness and thick silence. I feel like I have fallen into an enveloping abyss. I look up and notice a break in the darkness high above me. I can see the night sky, almost dark blue in contrast, speckled with stars. I realise, I am in a very deep underground cave; and I am all alone. I cannot escape. My face feels wet with tears. As I tearfully gaze at the stars, I feel chillingly cold, aching empty, and soon, numbness.

Figure 3

“Night sky seen from cave abyss”



Note. This is a photo of my own crayon artwork depicting the night sky at the mouth of the abyss.

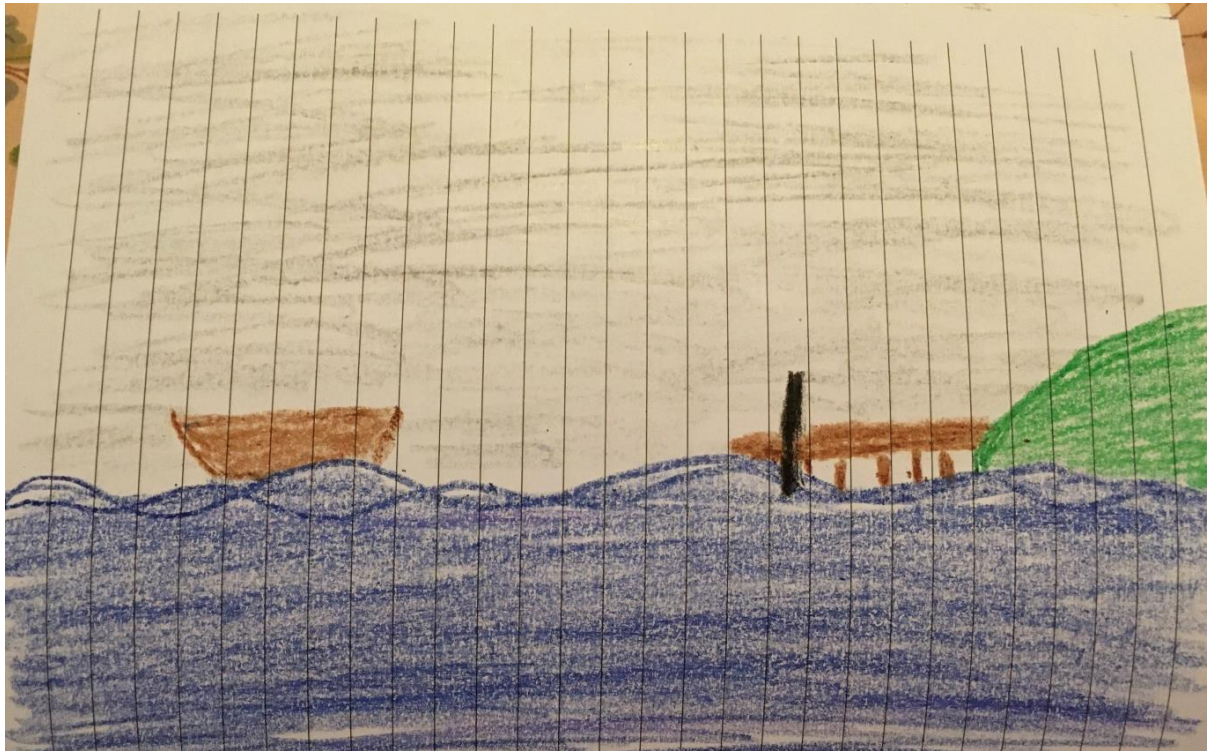
On experiencing these two reverie imageries, it helped me connect with and realise my immense fear of reading and immersing myself deeply in the book *“The Monster Calls”*. It

illuminated for me that metaphorically, I saw the book as an endless rabbit hole where I could become completely lost in, and where I could lose me and my entire sense of self in. I had flashes of seeing myself in a catatonic state, staring off in a distance – eternally lost inside and unreachable. I discerned that this came from a deep sense of feeling as though no one would care or notice if I was gone or that I was lost, that no one would be around to pull me out of the hole. I was afraid of feeling completely alone again – the type of aloneness that feels paralyzingly cold and gapingly empty.

On sitting with my illuminative sensings, it occurred to me that I may be facing what Winnicott describes in his 1974 journal paper as a fear of breakdown. In this paper, Winnicott posits that the “clinical fear of breakdown is the fear of a breakdown that has already been experienced.” (p. 104). He further suggests that the breakdown had already happened, possibly near the beginning of one’s life, and the fact that it happened was then concealed away in one’s unconscious. Winnicott (1974) also spoke of remembering, where unconscious repression is lifted, and one experiences a past event/feeling/experience in the here-and-now as though for the first time. These ideas helped me consciously see and construct an internal frame of what I was feeling, sensing, and experiencing from the imageries and my research process so far. It helped me discern that my intense fear was of experiences I undoubtedly had before as a baby or a child; and that I was afraid that my delving into the book would return me to that cold desolate space and experience, where I would once again realise that I was all alone unmoored with no one around me, facing the strong possibility of being forever lost to the dark seas.

Figure 4

“Unanchored”



Note. This is a photo of my own crayon artwork depicting how unanchored I felt.

The above connections with my own resistance and Winnicott’s 1974 ideas on fears of breakdown also helped give me a better sense of what clients who have strong adaptive and maladaptive defences, or who may not be ready to explore too much emotionally, may be unconsciously fighting against.

[Intermission]

It may be pertinent to add at this point that despite these illuminations, I had wondered during my research presentation class as to how come I was feeling all this trepidation before I even read the book “*The Monster Calls*”. It was pointed out to me by an observant mentor that as it happened, I *had* already read the book. My first casual read during the past summer had given me a taste of what the book was like. That meant I already had a sense of what a deep immersive dive into the book may entail. Hence, all that has been

evoked in me so far, i.e., my wordlessness, my resistance, my fear of breakdown, was in part my heuristic journey into the book. Unbeknownst to me, my heuristic research process of the book “*The Monster Calls*” had started long before I consciously registered this was so.

Part 5

Fortification

While recognising my fear of probable past experiential breakdowns, I found myself connecting through the mist, to a small part of myself that said, ‘actually, I am not alone’. It was a very small voice, but it was there. However, I was still swimming in a sea of huge uncertainty of whether this was actually true. After some hesitation, I reached out to a close friend who reaffirmed to me that I was not alone. This interaction bolstered that small voice within myself and helped me realise that while I was still terrified of returning to that cold desolate space, things were now different. In a mindful reframing of my thoughts, I reflected – yes I had felt completely alone before as a child, but I survived. To me, that meant that I could survive a return to that cold desolate space; after all, I was able to once before. I also recognised I am now an adult. This meant I now have more capability and agency to put several things in place for myself to prepare for this expedition into the dark depths of my unknown or unconscious. And this time, I was no longer alone – I have the friendship and support of a number of people whom I trust and who have been there for me many times over the past few years. I set about getting myself prepared.

Readying the boat..

Figure 5

"The start of setting anchors"



Note. This is a photo of own crayon artwork showing the start of readying my boat.

One of the first things I set about doing in order to equip myself for this journey was to talk with a few importantly significant people in my life as to my recent illuminations above; and asked for them to check on me if they do not hear from me for a certain period of time, or/and when I notify them that I am delving into the book. Each agreed to this, and so helped me establish my metaphorical check-in wooden posts.

After establishing my social anchors, I felt a part of me settle. Yet, I noticed there was still a part of me that niggled and felt apprehensive. In staying with that feeling, I connected with an intuitive pull that perhaps I needed to prepare something more localised and personalised to myself for me. That way, I would have several ways to pull myself out of the immersive, probable regressive, depths when I needed to. This felt particularly timely as it

was around the same period where I was exploring new ways of grounding myself after experiencing overpoweringly strong countertransference of intense dissociation-derealisation with someone I was working with clinically.

Through much exploration in my clinical supervision, and through indwelling on my intuitive pull, I found myself one day driving to the mall. I went into a store, uncertain of what I was looking for. I soon found myself pulled towards specific objects – among them were an extremely soft fluffy white bear, a hand-size colourful dinosaur beanie, a small spiky exercise ball, and a bag of marbles.

Figure 6

Collage of white teddy, dinosaur beanie, spiked exercise ball, and bag of marbles



Note. These are my own photos of the items I was intuitively drawn to and bought.

I looked curiously at my choices and realised that I was arming myself for this journey into the book, not just externally with my social anchors, but internally too with objects that had underlying significance that I can clasp on to. There was something in the sense of touch sensation, and potentially colour and sound as well, that drew me to these objects. I realised that I was slowly nurturing and building up my internalised sense of self and support.

By this stage of my research process, I noticed the progressive movement of the book “*The Monster Calls*”. From the book being placed at the side of my desk, I was soon able to place the book right in front of me. After some time, I was then able to touch the book, which then progressed to being able to look at it for a few minutes without wanting to throw it out the window. By the time I fortified myself with my social anchors and personalised objects, I was able to open the cover of the book to look at its first page. I felt ready to launch into it.

Figure 7

“Equipped and ready to set sail”



Note. This is a photo of my own crayon artwork showing the readiness I felt.

Part 6

An Interlude

Just as I felt ready to launch into immersing myself into the book “*The Monster Calls*”, a few things happened which placed my immersive research process on hold. This included needing to manage and concentrate on the clinical aspects and case study assessments of the

final year of my psychotherapy training; managing my emotional and psychological state from another lockdown and saying more significant goodbyes to various people including peers, mentors, and clients; managing financial stress, job searches, setting myself up workwise, learning new clinical and administrative ropes, and taking on a bigger clinical load. I had no space for research during this time; life and survival took my full attention.

By the time I managed to wrangle everything, it was several months later. One could think of this as an enforced incubation period. Yet the difficult part of the enforced break away from my research is that I lost my process momentum. Instead, when I returned to open the book “*The Monster Calls*”, I found myself again strongly feeling my resistance in looking at the book as well as the urge to run. My defences were back up. As I continued navigating two jobs and the curveballs that came with each, I again worked on letting go of my resistance. It was not easy to create the space internally to continue my research process during this time and so it took a while to get back to some semblance of the immersive research readiness I had felt before.

Going through this during this period helped me make more sense of my research journey so far of experiencing wordlessness, disassociativeness, resistance towards immersing in deep exploration of the book, and wanting to run. Both processes of experiencing and making sense of what had come up for me helped inform my clinical work during this time, in that, it helped me gain more understanding and increased empathy for a different more supportive way of psychotherapeutic working, particularly with clients facing life-and-death and survival concerns. There is no space for any deep interpretative exploration when one is in the initial periods of intense emotional throes of staring death in the face and/or fighting to survive. This reminds me of Brown (2012) where the author describes the state that Bion was in when he came under fire in a battlefield during World War One and watched his young comrade slowly die after being horrifically injured by German artillery. There was no space for any mentalising thought until forty years later where Bion felt safe and contained enough to explore what and how it was for him to have experienced what he did (Brown, 2012).

Unfortunately, I did not have forty years, and with academic time pressures soon beckoning, I decided to take the plunge into the book despite ongoing deconstruction and re-anchoring.

Chapter 2 – Down the rabbit hole we go..

In this chapter, I will describe my thoughts, feelings, sensings, other evocations, and my research process of immersing myself in the book “*The Monster Calls*”. I will also touch on some of the themes that came up for me through this immersive journey through some elaboration in each Act.

As described in my Method and Methodology section, I read each chapter of the book three times, each time noting down what came up for me. It is worth noting that there are 32 chapters in total for this book. Due to word count and scope limitations, I am unable to elaborate explicitly on all the themes that came through for me in this immersive journey. As such, here is a glimpse into my journey into the book “*The Monster Calls*”.

*Act I**The Beginning***Figure 8**

Interpretative title: "Tree Monster – The first meet"



Note. This is a photo of the book illustration on p.16-17 of the book "*The Monster Calls*".

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The start of my journey was filled with tentative nervousness. The first book chapter introduced me to the protagonist Conor waking from what sounded like a recurring frightening nightmare at a specific time (12.07) and meeting a terrifying tree monster which he says he is unafraid of. I found my heart beating fast as I wondered curiously of the

nightmare Conor had, the state he is in, and the scary appearance of the tree monster. I wondered, somewhat admiringly and trepidatiously, at what I thought was perhaps foolish bravery on Conor's part in telling the tree monster to come and get him. I then felt fear for Conor when words described the tree "monster's mouth roaring open to eat him alive"... (Ness, 2011, p. 19)

Abandonment, Loss, and Longing..

As I weaved through the first few subsequent chapters of the book, one of the first themes I noticed was Conor's need for self-sufficiency, control, and autonomy while dealing with his mother who is sick from cancer, and his grandmother who came across as brusque and authoritative. I found myself feeling annoyance towards these two figures and realised that I was connecting to a few things. One was an underlying sense of feeling trapped. I soon discerned that this was an identification on my part due to my past childhood experiences of authoritative, seemingly unfeeling adults. The second was a sense of loss – Conor was losing his old way of life, and the strong dependable protective mother that he knew. I felt sad and wondered if there was anyone in his life that could be present for him, e.g., his father. I also felt a sense of helplessness and powerlessness – there was a sense of choice being taken away from Conor and that things were going to happen regardless of how he felt or what he wanted.

In wondering of other potential support system for Conor, I soon learned that he was being bullied at school. I felt protective over Conor and anger towards his teachers, wondering where they were and how come they were not helping Conor when they knew how the bullies went about their business. Delving into my emotions and focusing on this helped me realise more of my own underlying buried anger connected to my being bullied at school, as well as my suppressed pain and distress over having no one protect me from traumatic instances where I had been unable to defend myself when I was a child. For Conor, there was someone who wanted to help – his childhood family friend Lily. However, he pushes her away by throwing her under the bus with the teachers, treating her coldly, and giving her the

silent treatment. I noticed myself feeling infuriated with Conor on reading this. Why was he being so nasty towards the one person who stood up for him? On pondering this, I came to a hypothesis that perhaps she was one of the few people in Conor’s life that he *could* be nasty to. For one, she was someone who really knew him and someone he had trusted. It could be that she was the closest and easiest person to blame and be angry with when everything in his life seemingly changed overnight – it was the only thing he could control or push against. Could Lily potentially be what Holmes (2001) and Bowlby (1988) described as a “*secure base*”¹ for Conor? Or might this perhaps be the underlying function of the tree monster in its moments of materialisation and coming forth to be with Conor and in its telling of the three stories?

¹ **Holmes (2001)** describes a ‘secure base’ as a caregiver or an external figure who can provide essential protection needed for a child or an individual in distress or when their survival is threatened. It can also be “a representation of security within the individual psyche” (p. 7).

Bowlby (1988) describes a ‘secure base’ as space provided by available, responsive, boundaried, and supportive parents which allows a child to venture into the “outside world and to which he can return knowing for sure that he will be welcomed when he gets there, nourished physically and emotionally, comforted if distressed, reassured if frightened” (p. 12).

Figure 9

Interpretative title: "Changes through time and stories – "Standing with"'"



Note. This is a photo of the book illustration on p.110-111 of the book *"The Monster Calls"*.

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As I read on into the book, I learned that Conor's father was predominantly absent in his life after his parent's divorce. His father was also living in a new continent with a new wife and a new baby daughter whom he seemingly worried about and gave attention to, while continuously making excuses as to why he could not be there for Conor. It felt to me as though Conor was being left behind, discarded almost. I felt angry for Conor. The feeling of abandonment increased on reading how Conor realised he had not been invited to live with his father and his new family in event of his mother passing. I felt a pang of hurt and pain in

reading his awareness of this, for in a sense, Conor is being abandoned by all parental figures in his life during a particularly difficult period of his life – his father for a new family, his grandmother for his mother and perhaps to an extent herself, and his mother to sickness and cancer. This connected to my sensing of how alone Conor seemed to be as a 13-year-old child – it felt as though he had no one creating a secure space for him to process any of his emotions in relation to what was happening with his mother and the changes in his life. No one but perhaps the tree monster.

Realising upon Conor's sense of abandonment and keeping in mind his earlier sense of self-reliance and pushing away of Lily, it highlighted to my mind more of John Bowlby's theories of attachment. According to Bowlby (1988, 2005), at any stage of our lives, we learn to be self-reliant when we recognise (consciously or unconsciously) that an attachment figure is untrustworthy in creating a secure and safe base for us. This seems more so for children. This can happen when attachment figures like parents are partially or completely absent either by choice or circumstance (as can be seen in Conor's situation); unresponsive, dismissive, or rejecting to our care-eliciting cues (as can be seen from Conor's grandmother and father); controlling through threats of withdrawing love, abandonment, and harm to self or others; and guilt-inducing through claiming one's behaviour is responsible for any bad fate that befell them (Bowlby, 2005). For children, such experiences can lead to living with heightened anxiety. This increases when there is then pressure and unconscious (or conscious) encouraging for the child to take on premature responsibility of the parent or of a tumultuous situation (Bowlby, 2005). In such situations, Bowlby (2005) purports that anger towards the parents is aroused but any expression of this is likely to be inhibited due to existential survival or guilt. The anger in turn may be unconsciously redirected inwards (McWilliams, 2011), or to someone weaker (Bowlby, 2005) – in the context of *"The Monster Calls"*, this can be seen as Conor being angry at Lily and punishing her.

Bowlby (2005) also states that it is possible for one to develop compulsive self-reliance where one would do everything for themselves regardless the circumstance, e.g., how Conor strives to take care of himself and his mother without help from others. This would involve

pushing away those who may want to provide love and care, as one would feel anxiously terrified to make attachments or allow themselves to trust or rely on anyone lest they be painfully let down and disappointed (Bowlby, 2005) (as can be seen in the book with Conor towards Lily and his teacher Miss Kwan). It is maintained by Bowlby (2005) that underneath it all, there is an unexpressed longing for care, love, and support from their main attachment figures who unfortunately are or were unable to provide such security and care for intentional or circumstantial reasons. Instead, any expression of such yearnings may bring up more anxiety and guilt, especially when life stressors like serious illness or death is involved. In connecting to all this, I found that I was able to be more present and perceptive to this phenomenon described by Bowlby in my clinical work, and noted how pronounced it could be in my work with clients who are going through a loss, whether it be a bereavement, losing parts of themselves or people whom they love to serious illness, or losing something that had been a huge part of their life and identity, e.g., the end of a long relationship.

The linking of Conor’s story and Bowlby’s theories with my clinical work was further strengthened with my becoming aware of my own underlying emotions. In sitting with the feeling of abandonment and aloneness from reading of what was happening with Conor, I had connected with my own past childhood experiences of such and found myself rediscovering the contours of the deep cold familiar cave that I had previously found myself in earlier in this research process (see Results Chapter 1, Part 4b). In the journey of such rediscovery, the coldness gave way to an ocean of tears and then to bright flashes of burning anger...

Act II

Fury

I had noticed instances of anger throughout the book, e.g., when Conor speaks to the tree monster and Lily, when he speaks of his grandmother and mother, and when he thinks of his father. What I had not anticipated was the searing ferocity of Conor’s anger when it was finally allowed to be expressed.

The first instance happened after Conor realised he would not live with his father after his mother passed. I had felt Conor’s hurt and pain of abandonment, and when he interacted with the tree monster after, it felt to me that his anger was finally allowed to come alive. I noticed a part of me rejoiced and felt glad for Conor being allowed the space to express his anger and for him to be able to do so. As the intensity grew, I found myself feeling thrown. I had never read of stories where a child protagonist, and a male one at that, was allowed to completely feel into the full intensity of their anger (or of any emotion). I felt surprise and awe, and noticed myself wonder at my ignorance of males feeling and having such intense emotions. This made me further ponder on my own social, cultural, and gender bias; and how that may have played out in my personal and professional life, especially in clinical therapeutic spaces with clients. I realised then I had made conscious another of my unconscious blind spots, i.e., my internalised and socialised perceptions of men and emotions.

Going back to being with Conor in his first storm of anger, I noticed my surprise soon gave way to fear. I felt fear at the intensity of Conor’s anger; the burning force of which felt so raw and visceral that it felt as though I was in danger of being obliterated by it. That part of me wanted to run away. Yet, I realised I also felt fear *for* Conor – I was afraid and concerned that he could potentially hurt himself in his furious destruction of his grandmother’s living room, and of how his grandmother might react when she returned. The latter was what Conor feared too after his anger drained away from him.

Figure 10

Interpretative title: “Aftermath of destruction”



Note. This is a photo of the book illustration on p.122-123 of the book “*The Monster Calls*”.

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On reading Conor’s grandmother’s reaction, I remember feeling baffled during my first reading. She had not shouted or reacted to him; instead, she ignored him. I remember feeling anger at Conor’s grandmother for not addressing Conor and simply walking away from him. Could she not see that he needed her to comfort him, to see and be with him, I thought. It was only during my second and third reading that I discerned that her walking away could have been indicative of how overwhelmed she was – his grandmother was earlier described as a very proper unemotional person who told others what to do and cared for her own house meticulously. I realised that her initial reaction on walking into the demolished

living room had been one of tiredness and then shock. I also realised that she had then joined in solidarity with Conor's anger in her wailing and destruction of further pieces in her beloved living room. It was then I beheld her anguish, pain, and feeling of helplessness – she was a mother who was losing her daughter to cancer and there was nothing she could do to stop it. This comprehension helped me reconnect with Conor's earlier pain of betrayal and abandonment by his father, and I realised that there were two people in immense pain – Conor and his grandmother. This facilitated a recognition within myself that there was potentially agonising pain underneath anger.

This recognition further connected upon reading Conor's second instance of ferocious anger where he took his emotions out on his bully Henry.

Figure 11

Interpretative title: "Fighting a bully"



Note. This is a photo of the book illustration on p.158-159 of the book "*The Monster Calls*".

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At first, I found myself cheering for Conor and his being able to stand up to his bully. Yet as Conor's punches became increasingly violent and relentless, I noticed a part of me flinch. In sitting with my flinching, I realised I again had not anticipated the expressed intensity of his emotions. I was again feeling thrown and soon recognised a connection to my earlier discomfort, fear, and concern of such fierce violence. This time, however, Conor's anger felt slightly different to me. I noticed it feeling grittier somehow. On dwelling in my sensings and re-readings, it occurred to me that this anger was seemingly derived from Conor's pain of having become invisible; from what felt like his sense of loss in self and

identity, as people no longer saw Conor as he is. Instead, it seemed that people around Conor only saw a child whose mother had cancer and hence avoided him, pretended he was not there, or spoke to and of him in relation to his mother. I also found myself wondering of Henry being the only person who did see Conor, and the bullying that Conor withstood from him where at some points it was described as though Conor welcomed it. As I read and re-read the interactions between Henry and Conor, it dawned on me that perhaps Conor felt shame in himself for his angry thoughts towards his mother for inadvertently placing him in such a position where he has become unseen and where past normality and good moments seemed inadvertently taken away. In Conor's shame, it appeared that he perhaps felt he deserved to be punished. I wondered, could Conor have projected his internal persecutor onto Henry? And in beating Henry up, could Conor be trying to break free of his own self-loathing? Or was the violence a way for Conor to show those around him his pain and inner conflict? Could it be that Conor felt it was the only way he could reclaim himself and finally be seen?

As I pondered about all this, I found myself reading on the moment when Conor received Lily's note where she wrote "*I'm sorry for telling everyone about your mum (..) I miss being your friend (..) Are you okay? (..) I see you (..)*", with the *I* underlined about a hundred times." (Ness, 2011, p. 172). It was here where I noticed a lump in my throat and my eyes welling up with tears. Somehow it felt very poignant in reading Conor realising that Lily really did see him. I found myself remembering of the moments where someone did the same for me and the swirl of emotions that arose at those times.

In my continued focusing and indwelling of the various moments and realisations of pain, anger, and reconnection, I noted several additional intertwined sensing, feeling, and thinking aspects that came up for me. One, I found that it has allowed me to reconnect deeply to my own intense buried anger, the pain beneath that, and the past experiences that these were connected to. The journey through the re-experiencing of my emotions and past experiences here felt viscerally tumultuous, and I noticed my physical and psychological body feeling raw, as though I had ripped open an impacted wound. During this time, I

discovered the importance of my reaching out to several of my pre-arranged anchors, i.e., the supportive individuals in my life, various self-care activities including sleep, and the soft toys I procured which by now also included two Glumps (see Figure 12) – these were either held in my hand, or sat with me on my lap or at my writing desk as I read and journaled. I found the Glumps in particular to be helpful physical anchors and reminders of a visualised representation of my emotions as little monsters that needed attention, love, and care.

Figure 12

Photograph of grumpy and cheeky Glumps



Note. This is my own photo of Glumps I bought from Skye of *The Peculiar Pixie*. Glumps are the copyrighted creations of *The Peculiar Pixie*. Adapted with permission.

The second aspect that was brought up for me, which was further bolstered by the aforementioned processing of my own emotions and experiences, was a noticing within myself of potential undercurrents and links in my clinical work with clients in regards to pain, anger, and loss; as well as recognising the potentially different positions and responses

of different individuals experiencing the physical and/or psychological loss of a loved one, whether it be from sickness, death, or early abandonment.

In sitting with the gentle recognition of such links in my clinical work, I found myself connecting to a story written by Donald Winnicott in his 1949 paper “*Hate in the Counter-Transference*”. In this paper, Winnicott described taking in a 9-year-old boy who was evacuated from his home and family during World War Two. The boy was described to be lovable and yet “the most maddening of children, often stark staring mad” (p. 72). The child would often run away in an effort to protect his inner home and soon started externalising the assaults that he felt on the inside on Winnicott and his wife – I interpret this as the boy lashing out on them both in intense anger. Winnicott describes feeling hate and anger towards this child, noticing such feelings, and yet being able to convey this to the child without malice and being able to draw protective boundaries around the child without anger or blame. Clinically, this story connects for me with how it is possible and ok for analysts and clients to feel anger and hate for each other; it speaks to the importance as well as to how it is possible for analysts, even when feeling anger and hate, to hold a therapeutic space to allow clients the freedom to hate, which helps facilitate their connection to emotional authenticity and their underlying pain. In the context of Conor’s story (and perceptibly my own), it connected me to the importance of a parent or another being able to withstand and hold the space for Conor’s anger and hate, even when they themselves may be feeling the same. I noticed myself here feeling very sad and yet somewhat relieved that Conor has the tree monster and Lily. It also made me wonder about my own past and present experiences and connected me with the underlying emotions of such.

Act III

Terror

A. The Silhouettes

I noticed that fear was another theme that seemed threaded throughout the book. There were numerous moments where I felt varying intensities of fear arise in me, or when

the story speaks to Conor feeling scared, e.g., in Conor's interactions with the tree monster and its gashing teeth. Some of these moments felt peppered with strong denial on Conor's part, e.g., that his mum will get better and return from the hospital. For my part in this heuristic process, I will write here of one main period in my immersion in the book where I felt fear so strong and heightened that it felt as though I was sitting interminably with pure terror.

The main period I will be describing here would encompass the last eight chapters of the literary book. However, before delving more into the sensings and noticings that arose for me during that particular period, it may be pertinent to note the feeling of fear was noticeably a constant companion for me through the reading and re-reading of each word and page of the book. It was after all a story of a tree monster, anger, destruction, nightmares, isolation, and a dying parent. In addition to holding and noticing the constant presence of such an emotion, I also found that my heuristic process during a particular point earlier in the book allowed me to tap into a deeper well of emotions and understanding and helped me better process what arose for me in those last eight book chapters. This earlier point in the book was when the tree monster told Conor his first story – it was of a prince beloved by his people, his father the old king, and his young stepmother the queen who was rumoured to be a witch. Processing what came up for me from my first reading of this story helped me realise how my own history of reading stories and fairy-tales affected and biased my judgement of the telling and journey of that story. Keeping this in mind during my second and third readings, I found myself noticing and wondering more on the implicit and nuanced aspects of the story and what arose for me. This eventually led me to suddenly notice for the first time after three sightings, the figure bearing a knife over his head in the book illustration below (see Figure 13).

Figure 13

Interpretative title: “Horse and the prince”



Note. This is a photo of the book illustration on p.70-71 of the book “*The Monster Calls*”.

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Seeing this figure with unexpected clarity brought me face to face with my own feelings of horror where I realised that the prince had nonchalantly killed the woman whom he charmed and is said to love dearly, and potentially his own father the old king, for the purpose of further vilifying his stepmother as an evil witch and reinforcing his image as a benevolent righteous young prince. My initial thoughts of the story had been that the tree monster told Conor this story to highlight that no one is completely good or evil; that everyone exists in the grey. By heuristically processing the story and how it was told through the re-readings, this process allowed me to slow down my noticings and thoughts which led

me to an awareness of how the story alluded to the power of rumours or “spoken words and stories”, and also to a recognition of the level of cruelty and violence hidden slyly under a long purposeful charade of goodness and charm. This latter realisation brought me to a place where I found myself feeling into a heightened sense of fear which I had not felt before. It was in this heightened feeling state that I found that I was able to consciously feel, see, and sense fear in a fuller magnitude.

Being in such a state at that time of my heuristic process allowed me to learn more on how to shift away and move out of being with such intensely affective feelings. In this instance, I had the help of a supportive mentor, who as an external containing figure, helped ground me from the powerfully sweeping emotions to the here-and-now and the more structural process of my research work. It was this experience of conscious feeling-into and moving-out-and-away of such strong emotional states that aided my heuristic immersive process of the last eight chapters of the book.

B. The Ensemble

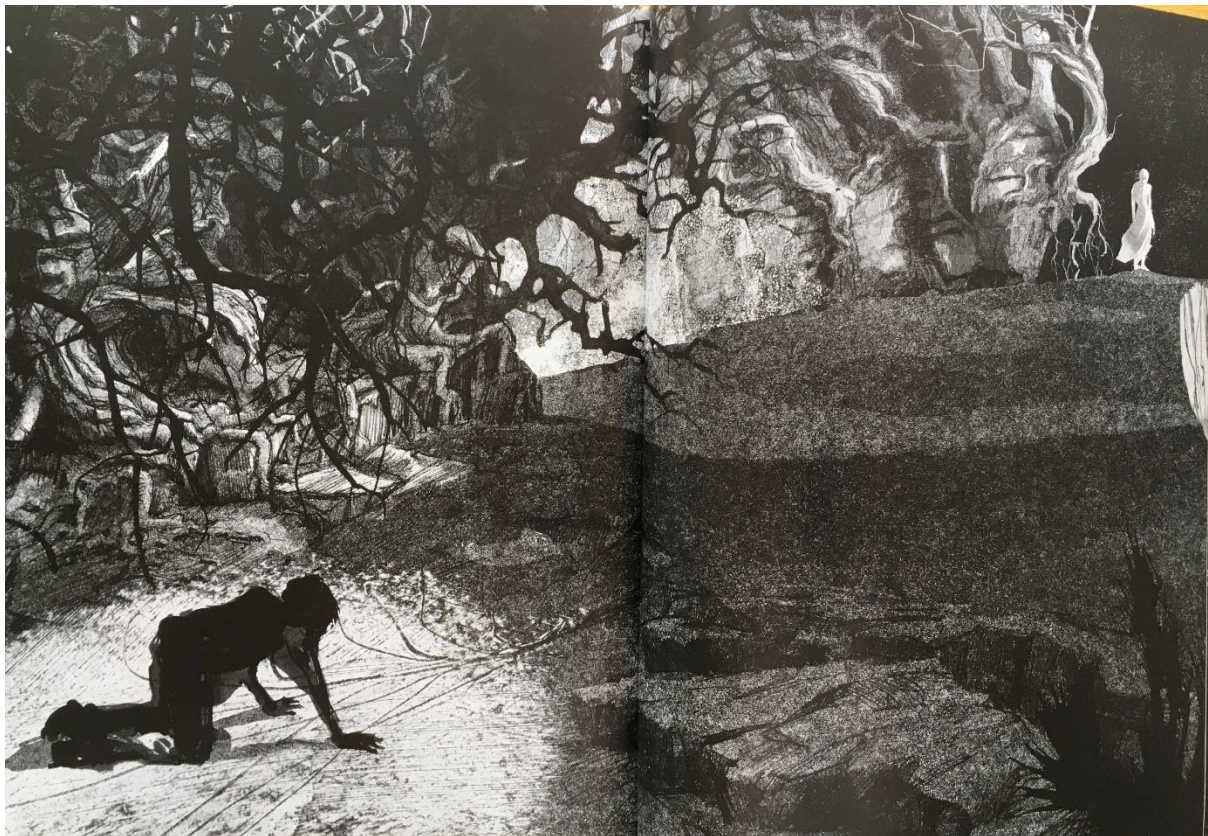
Reading and immersing myself in the last eight chapters of the book was a profoundly affecting and emotional experiential journey for me. I started noticing the intensity kicking in when Conor was called out from class after he received Lily’s note. I sensed a rising feeling of dread from inside myself, with a pit forming in my stomach and a catch in my throat as though it was closing up. I found myself feeling what felt like a sense of reluctance and a sense as though I was bracing myself for something that cannot be avoided; this could possibly be mirroring Conor’s journey of needing to now face what was coming. There was a heavy sense of no escape...

As I continued reading the words on the pages of the book, I slowly but surely felt into Conor’s increasing fear, desperation, helplessness, and anger as he starts confronting the reality of how badly his mother has deteriorated to the fact that she is indeed dying. I felt the emotions swell within myself on reading how Conor realised he had wished for the tree monster to save his mother and for that last hope to no longer be possible. I felt the emotions

crescendo to the highest peak for me when Conor was forced to strip back his sense of denial to face the excruciating truths in his nightmare; truths that he did not want to face for fear that the shame, guilt, anger, and sadness would annihilate him entirely. Part of me wanted to scream at the tree monster to stop it, stop it all – it felt so savagely torturous. I felt Conor’s deep anguish and terror tear me up from the inside out and I cried with him as I felt into his sense of complete loss and powerlessness. It was here that I realised that I was revisiting my own full sense of terror in past experiences of feared annihilation.

Figure 14

Interpretative title: “Laboured desperation”



Note. This is a photo of the book illustration on p.186-187 of the book “*The Monster Calls*”.

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One of the painful truths buried in Conor’s nightmare had been the undeniable inevitability that his mother was going to die and that no one, including Conor himself, could do anything to save her from Death’s cliff edge. In the process of realising this truth, the tree monster helped Conor recognise and feel into his intense terror and desperation of wanting to stop his mother from going over the cliff, and the deep powerlessness and helplessness he felt in knowing that death was coming for her and no matter how much he tried, there is nothing he can do to stop it; that ultimately, he cannot save his mother.

Figure 15

Interpretative title: “Abyss”



Note. This is a photo of the book illustration on p. 192-193 of the book “*The Monster Calls*”.

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This led into the second unbearable truth that the tree monster helped Conor confront – that Conor has released his mother's hand in his nightmare. Recognising this completely laid bare Conor's weariness, anger, shame, and fear. It forced Conor to acknowledge that a part of him did wish for his mother to die already, the part that longed for it all to end; because everything, including waiting for her to go, was overwhelmingly exhausting and too painful for him. This was the part of Conor he very much hated and felt ashamed over. Conor blamed himself for letting go his mother's hand in his dream and for his unconscious weary wish, for which he felt he deserved punishment for and feared that he would be completely obliterated for even thinking and wishing so. I found myself in a stream of tears as I felt into Conor's deep shame and pain. I felt myself longing to tell him that it was not his fault. When the tree monster helped Conor realise that it was human to have such thoughts and that thinking of something like that does not equate his whole actuality and being, I felt a sense of immense relief and gladness for the monster's presence with Conor.

The journey of Conor confronting the unbearable truths buried in his dream consequently helped him recognise the immensity of love he felt for his mother, and his fear of such a profound loss. It gave Conor, for the first time, the clarity to *see* his grandmother, her pain, and her tremendous love for her daughter. It also helped Conor to subsequently realise that the tree monster came alive to be there for *him*, allowing him to finally appreciate the tree monster's presence and warm embrace. These conscious comprehensions allowed Conor to ultimately discover that his pain and fear of love lost was shared; he realised he was not alone.

These painful truths and realisations of love, grief, and loss for Conor brought up for me memories of various past instances in my life where I experienced and felt such a heavy sense of loss, terror, and futility. These included instances where impactful or life-changing decisions were forcibly made for me without any consideration or input from me; and instances where life and/or circumstantial events disrupted and caused what felt like uncontrollable chaos around me. These were situations where I felt there was nothing I could do to control or save anything including myself. While sitting in such memories and self-

vulnerability, I noticed myself wonder of moments in my clinical work where I remember wishing I could do something to ease a client's pain or fears, to help keep them safe and protected, and to potentially save them, whether it be from violence, death, or the pain of saying goodbye to the things, spaces, and people lost. It soon dawned on me that perhaps what was most terrifying, whether it was for me, Conor, or perhaps someone reading this; the utmost fear was the absolute permanence and finality of losing something or someone beloved and treasured completely to an eternal abyss or an enduring death. Such a loss would mean that there was no way of ever being able to see, feel, regain, or experience something again, whether it was a moment, a space, a part of self, another being or person. The loss is final. Coming to such an awareness helped me connect to a core understanding and discovery from within myself, that perhaps the person I really wanted to save, and the person I wished I could have saved, was my own self, i.e., the terrified child in me who had experienced such loss, chaos, and anguish. It prompted another realisation that perhaps this was a core reason as to why I became a psychotherapist – I had unconsciously wanted to be present for people in pain and who felt alone in their pain and loss, so they would not feel as that child in me did.

W: "What makes you think talking about it will bring me comfort?"

The only thing that will bring me comfort is seeing him again."

[Silence, punctuated only with a head nod from V]

W: "Sorry..

I'm so tired..

It's just like this wave washing over me again and again.

It knocks me down and.. when I try to stand up, it just comes for me again.

And I can't.. it's just going to drown me."

V: “No. No it won’t.”

W: “How do you know?”

V: “Well, because it can’t all be sorrow.. Can it?

I have always been alone so.. I don’t feel the lack. It’s all I’d ever known.

I’ve never experienced loss because I’ve never had a loved one to lose.

But what is grief, if not love preserving?”

~ A conversation excerpt between Wanda and Vision from the tv series *WandaVision*
(Donney & Shakman, 2021, 23:23)

The Unexpected Offshoots..

Coming to such hugely emotional realisations at the end of my immersive journey into the book “*The Monster Calls*”, left me feeling very vulnerable intrapsychically. It was during this time I unexpectedly found my internal terrified state further destabilised by a sense of external unsafety and uncontainment due to a series of subsequent turbulent events which included a sudden strict lockdown, as well as both pervasive climate change phenomena and violent political incidences affecting people I know. This unforeseen level of uncertainty amplified my already heightened sense of fear and vulnerability, which thereafter spurred the need for me create some space and time away from further heuristic process and general life happenings in order to allow for what felt like me recollecting pieces of myself and reconstructing a sense of me.

The abovementioned stage of creating a better sense of inner safety and outer stability felt pertinent for me before I was able to continue with my heuristic research and writing process. As such, this stage allowed me to notice and observe the things that I do to create such stability within and outside myself – this included giving myself permission to withdraw into myself for periods of time and block out the increasing amount of tumultuous

news; creating more structure around myself with routines and schedules; reaching out to people close to me and revealing what is happening for me; and allowing myself to return to my present here-and-now by being more conscious of the wide range of sensations associated with my physical anchors of figurines, food, music, movies, and nature. After several days, I noticed myself feeling more settled and more ready to return to the last chapter of my heuristic research process.

It was at this time where I remember feeling as though my process of detachment and self-reorganization here possibly mirrored what Conor went through near the end of his own process in the book, whereby he learned how to allow himself to just be with the moments and those he cared about after reconnecting with himself, his emotional truths, and the people, beings, and spaces around him. In my wondering of this, I found my thoughts connecting me to Bowlby's (2005) early theory of childhood mourning which speaks to having three phases, i.e., anxiety and protest, despair and disorganization, detachment and reorganization. Accordingly, this theory was further refined by Bowlby into four phases, i.e., phase of numbness, which is almost immediate and can last from several hours to several days – this phase may also be interspersed with outbursts of anger and/or intense distress; phase of yearning and searching for what was lost – this can last several months to years; phase of disorganization and despair; and phase of detachment and reorganization (Bowlby, 2005). It was interesting to notice the resonance of both versions of Bowlby's theory of mourning and grief in Conor's story, in my heuristic research journey so far, and from within myself. This allowed me to realise that the main theme in my heuristic journey has been a self-exploration into loss (early and current), and the confronting and the re-experiencing of those unconscious or repressed states.

Chapter 3 – Reflection outside the rabbit hole

Due to the need to complete my research process and writing within a specific timeframe, I found myself having to try to consciously cut short any additional deep heuristic process of what arose for me *after* finishing my immersive process into the book “*The Monster Calls*”. That said, with the research thus far being as intensely affective for me in making conscious what was previously unknown to myself, I noticed that illuminative sensings and observations would still occur for me, albeit at a lesser degree. I found these occurrences allowed for some more continued learning from my heuristic research experience, which helped further inform my clinical practice and my sense of being. In this chapter, I will be describing a few of the significant illuminative sensings, observations, and learnings that came up for me since I finished the heuristic immersion into the physical literary book.

Verse 1

The Writing Process

The first strong feeling I felt after finishing my immersion into the book “*The Monster Calls*”, was relief. This, I thought, reflected the relief that Conor felt at the end of his journey after he was able to reveal his truths to his mother and allow himself to lean on the tree monster. For me, I felt relief at what I thought was the end of a brutal emotional journey through a previously unconsciously hidden rabbit hole. The difficult part of the journey was done – or so I thought.

What I had not anticipated was the difficulty in research writing my experiences and my journey of and through the book. In my drafting of each section, each paragraph, and each sentence describing the phenomenon and what arose for me, it felt as though I was transported back to those affective spaces, some of which made it hard to think or even construct a coherent sentence. I felt that all I had with me was a myriad of rich scribbles which I needed to weave into something comprehensible, something structured and yet true to me; and lapses of non-thinking moments. While pondering on this, its linkage to Bion’s

theory of beta-elements, and wondering in frustration as to where my alpha-function has gone to, I stumbled on a 2021 journal article written by Alisa Hirschfeld which talks of her ideas of '*Thinking and not being able to think*'. In her paper, Alisa mentioned that conditions that make it hard to think is when you are under pressure, being criticised, feeling angry or hateful, and when you do not feel loved. Reading that helped reshaped my wonderings by giving me additional cognitive structure to my frustrations and how I was. It allowed me to recognise my regressive state, and to reconnect that my heuristic journey and research writing process affectively touches into each of the experiential aspects Alisa described.

In making the above-mentioned connections, I realised that I had to find a way to navigate stepping into my deeply regressed state and then stepping out of it again in order to create a coherent, organized piece of writing that still speaks true to my experience and research journey. For this, I leaned back into looking at how I managed to do so while I was scribbling into my heuristic journal. A cup of hot drink or a bite of something sweet-savoury, a short dance or a stretch, listening to a song or a funny clip, watching the birds outside my window – I started to do all these again, interspersing them in my research writing, thinking, and feeling process. I noticed that in comparison to my heuristic journey thus far, I was compelled to do these activities more frequently in smaller doses while in my research writing process. This led me to thinking of these activities as productive mini-distractions as they allowed me to navigate, ground, and manage the states I was in (or at times found myself in). There were still some days where I would throw my hands up in exasperation as I would feel categorically stuck in a non-thinking space or find myself resolutely staying away from the affective material I was writing on. While talking to my peers about my process in this, it was pointed out that my process of stepping into, stepping out, running away, and distracting myself was very much like how one deals with grief, e.g., using distraction to ease and manage the emotions that arise, stepping away when it all becomes too much. This reminded me of my work with clients who have lost someone and helped me connect with a deeper understanding of how hard it feels to be in loss all the time and their process of needing to step out of it.

*Verse 2**The Fade Away..*

It was not until a senior practitioner at my work conversed with me about how I have been in my research process that I realised that I had unknowingly slipped away and withdrawn myself from most people around me. Yes, several people I am close to knew what was happening for me; but generally, it was almost as though I became invisible again. This was a surprise to me when I realised upon this – I had spent the past few years learning to be more visible to the people around me and thought I had made good progress. I remember feeling disappointed in myself, thinking that perhaps all my work had been undone and wondering how could I not have noticed the extent to which I had withdrawn from others. In pondering about this, I decided to speak of this and what was happening for me in my individual and peer supervision groups as well as in personal therapy. My experiences and interactions with individuals present in all those spaces allowed for me to connect to a few realisations of my post-immersive heuristic journey into the book “*The Monster Calls*”.

One such realisation was of how much I had regressed through my heuristic research experience. It was noticed to me once in personal therapy as to how elegantly I seemed to slip away – they observed that it was such a fleetingly quiet and unintrusive process that they had not even realised I was doing so until after months of working together. In our wondering together as to how come I did this, we learned of the reasons and of the past experiences underlying why I would have learned to unconsciously slip away. Remembering that discovery from my personal therapy helped me realise how much this heuristic research process has triggered me; and how when triggered, I regress with hiding (conscious or otherwise) being one of the familiar states I revert to.

On reaching that understanding of the state I was in, I found myself surprisingly filled with heightened uncertainty about becoming visible again. All the old questions of how I might be received and what people might do arose for me again; and I noticed a discomfort in my throat, as though there was fur stuck there, while my body seemed to be tentatively

leaning back, as though I was getting ready to physically hide. In taking the step to speak and reveal myself in different spaces and people, it felt like a process where I was needing to very consciously push myself to move me into the space – I imagined it as physically taking a heavy rock beside me and needing to purposefully propel my body in order to shift it into the middle of the room. It was during this time where I was reminded again of the safe and warm spaces that I have in my life, and the numerous nurturing and receptive people in them. With each warm interaction experienced with a person or a group I felt unsure about, it helped encourage me to reveal myself in more spaces because I became filled with the knowledge that even if I had a negative interaction, there were more people and spaces I could fall back on than I had previously realised. This was a new learning *and* also a re-learning for me – a discovery, and in some cases a reminder, of the nurturing people and spaces in my life presently. This filled me with much appreciation and reminded me of Conor’s journey of making his self visible to himself and those around him, his own discovery of the people and the being (the tree monster) who care and are present for him, and his appreciation for them all at the end of the book.

Verse 3

The Fearful Glump

Another significant observation that came up for me after finishing my immersive journey into the book “*The Monster Calls*”, was that I started noticing myself becoming more aware of when fear enters a therapeutic space, be in my own, my client’s, or both. It felt like I could feel, sense, and recognise its presence more acutely. I found this unanticipated development and growth helpful in my clinical practice as it has allowed me to be more attuned to my clients, their underlying emotions, and what they may be bringing into the space. I also found myself feeling more able to sit with and wonder about what may have been brought into the therapy room.

These illuminative noticings helped me realise that my heuristic journey in this research has facilitated my learning about my relationship with fear. This includes a

recognition of how I previously reacted and responded to the presence of the emotion (both in a professional clinical setting and in my personal life), and a learning of how this evolved through my immersive heuristic journey into the book “*The Monster Calls*”. I also found and learned of how my relationship with fear intersected with my own relationship with loss, particularly early and recent losses and the grief experiences underlying them. These connections and discoveries have given me more clarity with my research topic and question, by shining a learning light into the more shadowy, unconscious parts of myself – parts of which I feel I will continue learning in my journey as a living human person and as a psychotherapist.

Final Verse

A Tentative Ending

My ending here is a structural one, limited only to academic research structures and requirements. The discoveries and learnings I have gained through this heuristic journey will continue to change and hopefully develop more beyond this written work.

For this ending, I would like to finish the illuminative emotion-rich part of my writing (my “Results”) by sharing a poem I found while deep in my heuristic journey, as well as a self-drawing I created at the end of this journey.

The poem is written by Jackson Nieuwland, a self-described genderqueer writer from Te Whanganui-a-Tara, Aotearoa New Zealand. I want to place this here as a tribute to the authors, the illustrator, Conor, and the tree-monster of the book “*The Monster Calls*”.

The self-drawing is a deeply compelled creation that marks the end of this particular heuristic journey. It can be described as being one of the final parts of my creative synthesis in this heuristic research process.

The Poem

"I am a tree. Another tree. There are so many of us. I spend most of my time standing in the forest with my family. They love nothing more than to stand absolutely still like a plank of wood, only waving their arms every now and then to make sure there's enough wind for the birds to keep flying. The problem is, I hate standing for prolonged periods of time. My legs get all hot and itchy and I can't help but fidget. So every few hundred years, I pull my feet out of the ground and I go for a walk. I put my sneakers on and lumber slowly down the street to the diary, stopping every month or so to bend down and smell the flowers. I buy an ice cream cone and a can of coke and sit at the bus stop to eat. As I walk back, I look around the neighbourhood. I'm always surprised by how much has changed since my last stroll. A new apartment block, the green man in the traffic light replaced by an infinite purple spiral. I used to think that whenever I stepped on a manhole cover or ducked under the overpass, that I would be transported to another dimension. Every time I was disappointed that it didn't happen, but I still believed just as fully that I would be teleported to a different reality the next time. And then one day I was, and I realised that I had been wrong all those other times. I *had* travelled to different dimensions, I just hadn't noticed the differences, or I had noticed them but they were so small that I just explained them away as things changing over time. I have been a tree in every dimension so far, but I know that one day I will drop into a universe where I'm something else. A fireman or a unicorn or a bottomless pit" (Nieuwland, 2021, p. 3)

The Self- Drawing

Figure 16

"Adult and child on a journey"



Note. This is a photo of my own colour pencil artwork.

Section 5: Discussion

In this section, I will be talking of the learnings that have been gained in this research for myself and for my client work, and for the field of psychotherapy. I will also provide recommendations for possible future psychotherapy research, and speak to the strengths and limitations of my research.

Learnings and Benefits – Future Research

The heuristic research journey that I have undertaken by deeply immersing myself into the book “*The Monster Calls*”, have highlighted the potentiality of using literary books and written stories as a means of exploring parts of self that may be hidden, blind to ourselves, or too painful to consciously process. For me, I found that the process of using the book has allowed me to access parts of myself that I had a hard time describing, accessing, and making sense of. It helped me access my internal frame and provided a familiar transitional space that safely contained me enough to allow me to confront my unconscious and learned biases; learn of the shapes and contours of the various unconscious and conscious building blocks of my personality involved with adaptation, internalisation, death anxiety, grief, and loss; help me feel into and process experiences and re-experiences of painful early and recent moments and emotions; further aid and develop my understanding in the analysis of self and others; and learn of the importance and presence of having nurturing and responsive external and internal spaces and individuals. All these are aspects emphasized by Hoge (2008), Miller (2017), and Berman (2003) in various ways, speaking to the notion that literary books and stories can serve as imaginary analysts, provide safe containment, and act as possible transitional spaces which can foster play alongside self-exploration to uncover deeper truths, painful processes, and hidden shadowy parts of self. One could say that it speaks similarly to Winnicott’s idea of providing a facilitating space in therapy where play and curiosity is encouraged while warmth, care, safety and boundaries are upheld (Davis & Wallbridge, 1981). Such a link could be further explored in future research with regards to this topic, e.g., the relation of Winnicott’s ideas of transitional and facilitating spaces with the use of creative

mediums like literary books and written stories. This brings me to elucidate the strengths and limitations of my heuristic research I have undertaken.

Strengths and Limitations – Benefits and More Future Research

Firstly, I want to acknowledge the more experientially descriptive aspect of my research exploration and research writing. The purposefully descriptive prose-like writing, evident especially in my Results (Illuminations and Explication) section, is to showcase my research journey in its emotionally real, feeling, human process. This is done to highlight and to hopefully bring you as the reader closer to an authentically human experience of what it was like to use a literary book and written story to access the unconscious parts of self to process, e.g., what is like to feel loss and its underlying emotions instead of simply talking about loss and grief in theoretical terms.

One may say that because my research is written so descriptively and undertaken based on my own self-exploration and experiences, this may deride the generalisability and validity of my research in comparison to more empirical or theoretically grounded research exploration and writing. I would like to posit that the way I have done both my research exploration and research writing speaks to the humanistic philosophy that underpins the heuristic research methodology, which encourages curiosity, delving into, and staying true to one's experiences (Moustakas, 1990). This in turn promotes a level of generalisability, particularly focusing on the essence of human experiences (Moustakas, 1990). My research and its methodology may not be as imbued with comparative empirical accuracy since it is focused solely on my own emotional journey. However, my research journey does speak to essence of my human experience which may resonate in one way or another to others in way of a possible shared experience. It focuses on my genuine experiences whereby I speak to an experience, the process of such experience for me, and the process of thinking and making sense of it. It may be possible to use my research process and experiences to help others think about their own process and experiences in the sense of noticing, sensing, observing,

thinking, and making sense of what comes up for them by getting to know and interpreting using their own internal frame.

Additionally, the more descriptive nature and writing of my research may allow for you as a reader and for others to connect closer with possible underlying emotions within yourselves or while in a therapeutic space, which could be helpful for analysts and/or clients in thinking about what may be happening for themselves and the other/s while in clinical work. It also showcases a potential creative means in a clinical setting whereby people can choose to communicate in, if verbal communication is hindered or difficult, e.g., writing a poem or story if a client is too withdrawn to talk, or if something is too painful to be spoken or processed verbally – it may allow access to the non-verbal aspects of self possibly. This way of communicating could also include other creative mediums like making short films, music pieces, songs, dance movements, scribbles, drawings, paintings, sculptures, and sandtray play. It is possible for further research to be done involving each of these creative mediums through using heuristic methodology to add more knowledge to the existing field of such creative and expressive therapies and psychotherapy.

The more qualitative, experiential quality of this heuristic research also allows for someone like me, and perhaps you as the reader of this paper, a different perspective into exploring various topics of interest, e.g., feeling into what it is like to have loss and grief. Indeed with where this research ended, it may be possible in the future to explore more specifically the relation between loss and grief, loss and love, loss and fear, or loss and death anxiety. These could again be done heuristically, or perhaps be approached with a more structured or systemic methodology such as hermeneutic literature review or thematic analysis. Future research can also include possible exploration with a more theoretical lens, e.g., looking at loss and grief-related emotions with Winnicottian theories; with Freudian theories on mourning and melancholia or on life and death instincts; with different perspectives of grief-based therapy like Kübler-Ross & Kessler's Five Grief Stages; and even with Bowlby's theory of childhood mourning which was beyond the scope and depth of this research to enter into detail. Further research could also be done through a cultural lens

whereby topics of death, loss, grief, and/or the processes of such can be explored through different culturally based methodologies, like the Kaupapa Maori research methodology; through delving into the cultural and community practices, processes, understandings, and perspectives of various different cultural and societal groups, e.g., Maori, Pasifika, Malaysian; and through a cross-cultural lens, e.g., what is the experience of a Malaysian individual going the process of loss in a multicultural (or bicultural) landscape that is of Aotearoa New Zealand.

Perhaps one disadvantage of doing this research heuristically is the time and academic limits, and its affecting constraints on my heuristic research process. Moustakas' own heuristic journey spanned over 15 years as he journeyed into his human experience of loneliness, writing three books on it – “*Loneliness*” in 1961, “*Loneliness and Love*” in 1972, and “*The Touch of Loneliness*” in 1975. He states the following:

“The heuristic research process is not one that can be hurried or timed by the clock or calendar. It demands the total presence, honesty, maturity, and integrity of a researcher who not only strongly desires to know and understand but is willing to commit endless hours of sustained immersion and focused concentration on one central question, to risk the opening of wounds and passionate concerns, and to undergo the personal transformation that exists as a possibility in every heuristic journey.” (Moustakas, 1990, p. 14)

Along the same line, Sela-Smith's self-study took two full years. This is due to what Sela-Smith (2002) describes as the necessary “free-fall surrender to the process” (p. 70). Given that my own heuristic journey was to be done in over a year, I would venture that my experiences and themes explored in this written research paper are only a snapshot of what will most probably be a lifelong self-explorative journey.

Section 6: Conclusion

I would like to end this research paper with a small transcript from a recent interview actor Andrew Garfield (AG) gave to the late night host Stephen Colbert (SC), where he spoke to losing his mother recently and to using art to express and process his loss and underlying emotions. I feel that what he offered encapsulates the shared experiences and the humanity I have found present in my journey, my research, my learnings, and what I want this say through this dissertation.

A Transcript

(The Late Show with Stephen Colbert, 2021, 4:20)

SC: "... I know you yourself have suffered great grief, just recently with the loss of your mother and I'm sorry for your family's loss.."

AG: "Thank you.. "

SC: "And I'm wondering how doing this show or any show, how art itself helps you deal with grief."

AG: "Yea.. erm..mmm. I love talking about it by the way so if I cry, it's only like..
hmm.. it's only a beautiful thing. This is all the unexpressed love, right, the grief that will remain with us, you know, until we pass because we didn't.. we never get enough time with each other, right? No matter if someone lives till 60, 15, or you know, 99. So, I hope this grief stays with me, because it's all the unexpressed love that I didn't get to tell her. And I told her everyday; we all told her everyday (*gestures to his dad and brother offscreen*); she was the best of us.

Erm, so for me, I was able to step into this in a way where I could honour this incredible life of Jonathan Larson. He was taken far too soon; he died at the age of 35 on the night of the first preview of RENT off Broadway, the New York theatre workshop. Some strange twist of fate he was taken that soon. And this film ("*Tick, Tick, Boom!*") is to do with that. It is to do with the ticking clock we all have; that we all know, somewhere deep down that life is sacred, life is short, and we better be here as much as possible with each other, holding on to each other. And for me, I got to sing Jonathan Larson's unfinished song while simultaneously.. singing.. for my mother and her unfinished song. And I am indebted to John, and I'm indebted to Lin-Manuel Miranda. I am indebted to everyone who brought me to this place so I can honour the most beautiful person that I've ever experienced in my life through my art, and use it as a way to heal, use it as a way to sew up the wounds, because that's what we do right? That's what we do, that's what you do every night, you sew up our wounds (*gestures to SC*), you sew up our wounds (*gestures to Jon Baptiste - musician*). And both John and my mother were artists, and they were warriors for art, they knew the power of art and they knew the power of leaving the world in a slightly more beautiful state than when they found it. So, thank you for letting me talk about her and thank you for letting me talk about her with my two guys up there as well (*gestures to his brother and father*). So, thank you Steve."

SC: "Thank you for sharing with us."

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