

# De-Dehumanising the Autistic Other

## Between the Image of “Beast” and “Being”

### in J. K. Rowling’s ‘Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them’ - Screenplay and Book

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#### Abstract

The representation of autism in literature is a novelty of a delicate sense for what impact it can have on readers. Autism shows more frequently in the lines of Young-Adult fiction (YA), a genre known for its large audiences, which makes contemplating the image of an autistic person, as an actual character or a theme, either a means of access or a block to public awareness of the spectrum, respectively. The selected YA fiction works for this paper are *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, as screenplay (2018) and book (2001). The screenplay is not an adaptation of the book, but a background to the times when a character wrote his study book on the beasts that surrounds his environment. In the works, the use of terms like “monster” and “beast” seems to refer to a dehumanised image of the represented, which raises questions on why the writer would allude readers to relate autism to monstrosity; is she maintaining the habit of using illness as a narrative thematic tool or does she suggest otherwise? In order to formulate a ground for these inquiries, we will visit the text in relation to Lacan and Derrida’s thoughts on “Subjectivity” and how it defines fellowship from alterity and monstrosity. The objective of this research is to investigate the representation of autism in Rowling’s screenplay while backing up with examples from the book to see how far it meets the real or contrastingly contributes to reinforcing another stereotypical other.

**Keywords:** beast; dehumanised; autistic other; literary; character-centred; monstrosity; fellowship

#### Introduction

Literature is the looking glass of what happens in real life as it reports situations, struggles, and novelty to raise or answer questions about the human condition. Since the late twentieth century, a new concern has occupied texts that it became the duty of many to write about. By 1980, a new mental disorder was diagnosed separately from schizophrenia called Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It is characterised by behavioural and social challenges that appear in the child’s early years. The use of “normal” in contrast to where autism stands has been replaced by “neurotypical” to eliminated any verbal exclusion of individuals with mental disorders like ASD. To bring

more awareness about it, writers have shown the tendency to include autistic profiles in literary texts.

Introducing autism in literature has been challenging since it aims to help both autistic and neurotypical readers to ground a better understanding of oneself and surrounding. The genre that hosts it the most is Young-adult fiction (YA), whose rich audience joins adult, young-adult, and young readers alike. Autism appears to be YA fiction’s duty to communicate, yet whether it has met its task faithfully remains in question. For this paper, we have selected the works of J. K. Rowling *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, screenplay (2018)<sup>1</sup> and a book (2001) of different content yet of the same title. While the screenplay narrates the story of Newt Scamander on his journey to America to set free a trafficked beast back to its habitat of origin, he starts writing the book (2001) about other beasts he has met, providing readers with their names, habitat, and behavioural codes. Later in the *Harry Potter (HP)* series, it shows as a study book for young wizards in their class on beasts to learn how to approach, nurture, and protect them. This paper requires both works; the screenplay to examine the daily life of Scamander and how society sees and treats him, and the book to access characterising information about the beasts that inhabit his case.

The relationship between Scamander and his beasts is mirroring though they are of two opposing natural and societal classifications. The screenplay text seems to implicitly refer to Scamander’s autistic nature through characterising the beasts in his case with autistic traits. This paralleled description linking between the autistic and beasts raises questions whether Rowling is using autism as a narrative tool or she is formulating a counter statement against those who do. Accordingly, can her fiction eventually be a means to describing an autistic character to her large YA fiction audiences of neurotypical and autistic readers or reduce him/ her next to the literary? The word “monster” leads to investigating how the image of the former and autism can psychoanalytically intersect based on the theory of binaries.

This paper will approach the work from a Derridean perspective, prior to which comes that of Lacan. Lacan’s account on “Subjectivity” provides a list of those who constitute the self from those who fall off it. The binary of self and other is a theory that extends to two different ends. On the one hand, it suggests the first human developmental sense of consciousness that permits awareness of one’s physical, cognitive and emotive abilities that constitute a sense of identity. When in contact with persons, they are able to recognise they are “separate” from their being and have restricted access to them, and it is called identifying an “other-self”.

On the other hand, the binary does not stop at identifying who is other-self from oneself but extends to oppose them. It helps the self towards a better self-recognition, yet it sees those who do not meet its criteria as “less” and often dehumanises them. This binary usually surfaces within groups whose individuals come from different backgrounds (socio-political, cultural, historical, gender, and so goes). In *Fantastic*

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<sup>1</sup> The movie was released in 2016, but its screenplay was not published until 2018 by J. K. Rowling and Minalima Design (Firm).

*Beasts and Where to Find Them*, the binary of self and other, or “*Sovereign and Beast*”, as Derrida puts it, is manifested between members of the same society and culture where a fraction of them is not as typical as the rest.

In an attempt to formulate a pragmatic answer, this paper will be divided into three sections; a survey of the relevant literature in the scope of our inquiry, a section for deciphering the metaphoric representation of autism in the text, to end with an overview section on the aftermath of depicting autism.

## Literature Review

Portraying ASD in YA fiction has been subject to some controversies lately; whether the literary meets the real remains in question. After going through a literature review of the previous works, two classifications could be sorted out; autism is either portrayed as a theme or presented as a minor or major character.

Autism as a theme admits to a generalised and broad conceptualisation of the disorder. It is often *mentioned* rather than *included* in the narrative. In her critical book *Illness as Metaphor* (1978), Susan Sontag visits the representation of illness in fiction, synthesising with examples like Tuberculosis and cancer. In her view, writers use illness not to address it or build awareness upon it but as an element to their writing. The metaphor starts with “an evil, invincible predator” and continues as long as it remains mysterious for doctors to way out its cure (Sontag 7). When Tuberculosis became curable, cancer started being used as the new fatal circumstance in romances; the new theme.

ASD extends the incomplete list of illnesses as metaphors, as yet another mystery. As a theme, autism is about all that happens in the story and characters except around the autistic character. Its presence in narratives either symbolises a curse upon the cruel and his boon to pay (Bettelheim’s “refrigerator mothers”, 1967; Erdrich’s *Four Souls*, 2014); a blessing for the virtuous to care (DeLillo’s *Zero K*, 2016); or a burden that urges a parent to escape (Schulman’s *A Day at the Beach*, 2007; Shteyngart *Lake Success*, 2018), where an autistic child is added to the list of burdens the family had been listing. The preceding writers use autism as a *thematic* plot twist and a rhetorical tool.

In contrast, there is Naoki Higashida, a Japanese writer with low-functioning autism; his distinct behaviour shows more than those with high-functioning autism who are closer to neurotypical persons. Nonetheless, he developed a means of communication and succeeded in writing *The Reason I Jump* (2013). The book bridges readers to autism by describing an autistic character with all his complexity that does not sound as such and the life he leads within himself, his family and society. In other words, narratives shifted their polar and set it around the autist, a person character.

Thematic or character-centred plots might sound minor, but it carries major differences in the image they draw of autism. Since youth and adolescents are the primary audiences for YA fiction productions, it is important to ground these readers with an

awareness of the spectrum, as it is also necessary for readers with ASD to relate to the writing that is intended to represent them. Everyone has that inner need to see oneself being represented in fiction, yet the crisis is in the possibility of falling short next to the literary. Marie Myung-Ok Lee, a mother and writer in “The New York Times” magazine, expresses her concern about the generality and restricted view of autism in fiction. Reading can either widen one’s scope or reduce it, and she refers to the latter as falling victim to some “literary construct” (19). When a reader finds a character or writing that describes him/her, s/he tries to see how much in common there is to find. Thus, he either uses the narrative to help him in his daily struggles or admits to the representation and reduces himself to the definition he has just read. Considering that fictions on autism are growing in number yet still few, an autistic reader is more in danger than neurotypical readers. If the latter can avoid construction for having different literatures written on his nature, an ASD reader is more likely to be trapped inside that singular literary.

Another fictional character, though not “diagnosed” as such, is detective Sherlock Holmes. His acute vision, inability to hold full conversations with others, and inclination towards individual work insist on his autistic profile, Asperger Spectrum. A similar character appears in the writings of J. K. Rowling in *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them*, which is a production that summons both the visual and textual from the realm of the *Harry Potter* series. It is the prequel to a series of films (2016) and a visual context to a book of the same title. The screenplay is narrated by Newt Scamander, who later in the movie, as a writer, seals his book *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* (2001) finished. The narrator of the guidebook and screenplay is a “magizoologist”, a zoologist of magical creatures. In the screenplay, the events narrate how Scamander has been travelling around the world since 1918 to find new beasts and finished by the publication of his book in 1927 (timeline in the screenplay). He writes about the beasts’ nature and regime to guide wizards on how to approach them for the greater purpose of protecting them.

Regarding its release date, considerable researches are conducted on the screenplay and book. The screenplay is approached from the point view of reshaping the definition of masculinity in literary writing (Azizan 2020); reforming and aspiring morality towards humans and animals (Aruan; Sibirian 2020); semiotically studying how the imaginative falls closer or farther from the range of words (Indrawan 2021); and revealing characters’ personality through the study of names, called charactonym (Kusuma 2021). There also have been some research on the book separately in environmental and social ethics about hierarchies (Anatol, Fettke 2012), and in ecocriticism that investigates the different species and creatures that could factually exist (Gross 2017). The latter researcher synthesises that the creatures are “magi-fied” to denote how mysterious they remain to research. The works can open to further meaning when observing Newt’s behavioural code. While some see him as normal (i.e., neurotypical), others cannot but identify him with autism.

Zoologists have the habit of showing certain behaviour around animals. They usually must avoid “dominance display” in the presence of wild animals and show submission instead (Mikulincer 2). This way, the animal would open up to the zoologist and allow him onto its personal space, yet doing otherwise would radically alarm it to intrigue its defence mechanism. This technique appears to be what Scamander does around animals in the way he uses body language to communicate with his beasts and build a bond of familiarity. Nevertheless, this identification falls shortly when Scamander repeats it around people which shows some personal mannerisms. The actor who played Scamander’s character, Eddie Redmayne, opens up his thoughts about his character’s mannerisms. In an interview for “Digital Spy” in 2018, he describes his first reaction on hearing about his role,

When he was first described by Jo [Rowling] in the first film there were various qualities – the way he walked, the way he looked, and his eye contact – was spoken about,” said Redmayne. “I think he is on the Asperger’s spectrum. At that point, it hadn’t been defined – that was in the ‘40s, I think – so those qualities were something, YES. (Armitage “Fantastic Beasts” 3).

He forwardly states that nothing has been said about his character being on the autism spectrum though it met his assumptions. He further ascribes it to a type of high-functioning autism called Asperger for showing restricted behaviour and remarkable focus and acuteness. In his opinion, the only reason his character has not been “diagnosed” in the book is that its timeline does not allow it, for no identification of the spectrum has been made yet. Further, the university researcher Rocio Riesta-Camacho intrigues similar interest in her article entitled “Lumos! Action! Asperger’s Cognitive Dramatherapy through Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them: The Original Screenplay” (2019). She describes how the way he “quirks”, “skips conversations”, “avoids group behavior”, and is remarkably intelligent yet not stereotyped as an “autistic savant” (Riestra-Camacho 403; 405; 405; 404). She uses them to affirm speculations about his “diagnosis” with Asperger Spectrum.

There are books written to make readers understand autism and those addressed to readers with autism. In this paper, we will try to locate whether the work of J. K. Rowling *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find them*, screenplay (2018) and book (2001), thematically uses autism or includes it in its narrative to reach both audiences.

### **Scamander’s Suitcase and its Inhabitants: A Map onto his Mind**

Scamander always carries a leather suitcase with him. He journeys looking for beasts and provides them shelter in his *special*, magical case. It is way onto this character’s mind in that it metaphorizes who Scamander is from an inner and outer angle. In order to better decipher his character, this section will line up visiting the case and its inhabitants to see how they relate to his mind and autistic being; starting from the shape of the case to come to the interrelation between each beast and its companion’s mind.

Scamander’s suitcase is square-shaped and appears ordinary. It is described as a “battered brown leather case” (Rowling *F.B.* 1) that does not trigger interest or admiration in passers-by. Described as “battered” makes it sound old and suggests that it has been used more frequently. Readers’ access to it starts when Scamander meets a No-Maj<sup>2</sup> baker at the bank, to whom the place looks small full of belongings that look normal then he remembers he is *inside* a suitcase. He admits his prejudice and explains how deceiving it externally looks. After a first glance, he further realises “the place has swollen to the size of a small aircraft hangar”, and behind each closed door lay creatures, each in their “own perfect, magically realised habitat” (74). He thinks that a desert, hills, forest, and snowscape fitting inside a tinny case is part of his imagination, but then he admits he does not have “the brains to make it up.” (80). Eventually, the ordinary, boring, “battered” case opens to a small cabin which again opens to multi-environmental spaces.

In the movie trailer, a voice-over highlights the interrelation between Scamander and his case, saying, “[y]ou’re an interesting man, Mr. Scamander. Just like your suitcase, I think there’s more to you than meets the eye.” (*Fantastic Beasts* 00:11- 00:19). Similarly, only when the baker visits the case that he grows familiar with Scamander. At first, Newt looks weird and limited, yet when they get to know him, they can see how *different* he is in an extraordinary way (Rowling *F.B.* 81). Otherwise, all that people can externally see in him is a square-shaped object. Alternately put, the case symbolises Scamander’s mind, and its shape is a metaphor for how people see him.

Being prejudiced about persons with autism is summed up in the relationship between Jacob and Newt. Society often labels someone with autism as squared, as in a limited individual who cannot go beyond the confines of his/her restricting capacities. The assumptions made around autism, high or low-functioning, mean that the autistic person must be ‘less’. In *The Reason I Jump* (2007), Higashida validates persons’ prejudice towards autism. He addresses the world, “[y]ou can’t judge a person by their looks. But once you know the other person’s inner self, both of you can be much closer. From my point of view, the world of autism must look like a *deeply mysterious place*.” (qtd. in Myung-Ok Lee 17; *emphasis added*). How he describes autism as a mysterious place almost meets Rowling’s words of magic. By admitting it must be mysterious to neurotypical persons, he invites them to read his book, where they can meet, understand and connect to the mind of an autistic person beyond his/her looks.

### ***Beasts: Metaphoric Fragments of His Autistic Being***

Newt’s beasts are his companions until he escorts them safely to their homelands of familiarity. We synthesise that the way the author characterises those beasts gives clues about their owner’s person. Each “beast” symbolises a trait in Newt’s autistic personality, yet the choice of the term “beast” remains unexplained. In this sub-section, we will visit the definition of “beast” and “monster” and how central it is to Rowling’s

<sup>2</sup> No-Majs, also called Muggles, are the “normal” individuals who do not possess magic.

text, then move to the implications behind the anthropomorphic representation of each beast in relation to persons with autism.

The habitants of the case are sometimes called beasts, creatures, beings and even monsters. According to Newt, the classification of “being” from “beast” has been controversial and changing in the Maj-society. The definition of “being” changed from those in two legs, those capable of human language, to those who have “sufficient intelligence to understand the laws of the magical community and to bear part of the responsibility in shaping those laws” (Scamander x; xi; xii). All verdicts failed since some creatures glide or fly yet are capable of thought, others can speak but lack human intelligence, and muggles are incapable of magic yet they are not monsters. In other words, he suggests that there is no clear distinction between the two and classifying can only cause misunderstanding, which the whole purpose of classification is to avoid.

While “beast” is more likely to refer to an animal, “monster” is rather used to describe the unusual that comes from the product of a writer’s imagination. It can be said that “beast” is situated in the chasm of what could exist between the binary opposition of Human/ Animal yet belongs to neither. When taken to the land of the literary, fictitious description of the beast has reshaped it into many versions of the monster. In fiction, these terms are used interchangeably to denote that who falls off the normative.

The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary offers interesting definitions of the word “monster”. Etymologically, it derives from “terms for portent or warnings”, and from the six definitions it provides, we can sort out that “monster” is something that *necessarily* deviates from the normal type, either as a *feared creature* or an *exploited marvel* (Booker 1). In introducing Monster Theory, two substantive yet distinct understandings are provided on what makes a monster. According to Davies, “Cicero perceived monstrous births as signs of impending calamity”; conversely, Pliny the Elder argues that “entire races of monsters [are] dwelling in the far corners of the earth” (50). Cicero links monstrosity with deformed physicality while Pliny’s words outline two criteria in being a monster; that who is *unknown* because he is geographically *distant*. His statement allows the human mind to venture in the creation of monsters. His choice of words also infers inferiority in classifying those other-than-Western races, confining them under subdued marginalisation. Thus, monsters “are outcasts, ‘the embodiment of that which is exiled from the self’” (Richards 377). Accordingly, monster or beast is *less* when compared to the self, which raises questions not about where it should classify but what constitutes the normal from not.

Rowling’s fiction puts humans and beasts in the same line, wording through Newt that one can hardly formulate a distinction between them since they go by similar laws of govern. Putting human next to beast throws mention to Derrida’s lecture *The Beast and the Sovereign* that came in reaction to Lacan’s on subjectivity. While Lacan excludes animals from normativity, Derrida criticises that the binary opposition is a hegemonic construct that allows humans, or subjects as Lacan identifies them, to have dominion over animals; subsequently, it deprives the latter of ethical consideration, rendered into material for exploitation.

Beyond his contests to include human and beast within the same category, Derrida sheds light on the binary opposition responsible for alienating whoever falls in the definition of neither. While he questions "the very category of 'the animal' itself", he deconstructs "the age-old binary opposition between human and animal" (Oliver 54). In *Animals and the Limits of Postmodernism*, Gary Steiner remarks that Derrida's discussion on the subjectivity of animals is not followed "with an animal ethics with principles of conduct", yet it could pave the way for future research in ecology (qtd. in Direk 1). It makes Derrida's point more ideological than instructive, which inclines to his deconstruction of the binary human/ animal rather than suggestion of an ethical code of behaviour between the two. Milburn concludes that "Derrida's monsters are material and semiotic actors... symbolizing deconstruction and challenging the 'history of normality'"; subsequently, "he is also deconstructing the axiomatics of the Other, the impositions of the 'the Absolute Master'" (606; Direk 2). What seemed at first an attempt to end animal exploitation, which potentially aims to recognise them as sentient beings deserving of sympathy, develops into a statement directed towards the deconstruction of the "other", be it animal or -especially- human. Deconstructing the binary means erasing the subordinate presence of the "Whole Other" with the human hand of superiority. It does not relate to animal inclusion to Lacan's definition of subjectivity, as it highlights the destruction of the notion of other and whoever might fall into the abyss of alteration between what constitutes human and animal.

The importance of his statement lies in granting the other his/her human image and dignity of being treated as equal because compassion is only extended to those deemed to be our "fellow" (Derrida 106). Fellowship to Emmanuel Levinas' standards is facial recognition governed by the power of the *gaze*. The gaze constitutes the first encounter between the self and another self. It not only detects alterity in the other but is also responsible for "the refusal of alterity through non-recognition" (Wadiwel 15). Like Levinas, Paré insists that recognition is facial and physical, making "deformities" a form of monstrosity. Consequent to the gaze, the "Whole Other", "fellow", or "Cosmic Other" decides whether to include those they meet in fellowship and morally consider them or disregard them altogether.

According to Derrida, facial standard is not a criterion to tell familiarity from difference. He argues "that many people do not recognize their fellow in certain humans' who 'lack' the typical attributes of a person because of congenital abnormalities or *disease*" (qtd. in Moser 64; *emphasis added*). Already having the binary in question, this statement further questions the nature of the other beyond animality. Differently put, were monsters created as such or has man fallen into the trap of binaries and doomed his fellow humans in that categorisation? Colin Milburn lists "Derrida and Monster Studies scholars such as Evelleen Richards, Mia Spiro, Terry Caesar, Iris Idelson-Shein, and Nadja Durbach" who conclude that monsters are a social construct, and adds that "it is oppositional thinking that enables individuals to vilify, ostracize, and marginalize other-than-human entities and *those who are considered to be lesser persons based upon simplistic dichotomies.*" (qtd. in Moser 10; *emphasis added*). As such, "monster" is not a label for animals alone but for those humans who exist within the same social context



as the “normative” majority, yet failing to recognise their difference deems them inferior and is enough reason for the latter ones’ mind to use them in the evocation of monsters.

One literary example on generating monstrosity is Le Clézio’s fiction *Alma* (2017). The main character Dominique Felsen, nicknamed “Dodo”, suffers from extreme facial deformities upon a disease. He is hired in a freak show spectacle as that domesticated monster who can make his tongue touch his eyeballs, yet it does not stop his daily exposure to abuse. In Derridean terms, Dominique seems a fitting example of “artificial monstrosity” (Derrida 25). He declares monstrosity as “artificial”, an in made by humans and consented as a social construct that falls far from Dodo’s substantive nature. Dominique’s unrecognised deformity casts him off “the category of the human”, somewhere between the external confines of “dichotomous thinking”; the very place that monsters inhabit (qtd. in Moser 64). In similar words, Larsen and Haller describe that his disfiguration has “relegated [him] to the status of the subaltern who is no longer ‘fully human’” (qtd. in Moser 64). Put differently, it is the human gaze that created a monstrous image and attributed it to Dodo’s difference.

The Creation of monsters is a dehumanising process that operates by taking those who are recognised as *other-than-human* (even when they are not) and downgrades them to *less-than-human*. “Monsters” can be redefined from an innocent thrive of imagination against the unknown to an act against the other who is “not accorded the dignity of being fellows”, which “is a fitting description of the phenomenon of dehumanization resulting in the denial of moral status to individuals personifying atypical human corporality” (Derrida 108; Moser 77). Since the “Whole Other” acclaims his humanness, he dehumanises them to justify his relegation and cruelty. Moser refers to monsters as “victims” and the fatal “casualty” of “the social construct of monstrosity” (68). Hence, the dehumanisation of fellows to monsters is a way to find reconciliation in their marginalisation and enough reason to exclude and exploit them without feeling bad about it.

Like Derrida, Le Clézio denies the central part of Levinas’ facial standard in determining beasts from humans, declaring that deformities can also occur in humans. Unlike Derrida, Le Clézio explicitly shows that the dehumanisation of the other for his difference is what fuels the long created list of monsters. Dominique’s characterisation “evokes the metaphor of the monster-the outcast, the stranger, the marginal being who lives in multiple worlds without delegation” (Richards 404). When “Dodo” goes on his mission to Paris, he becomes the “ambassadeur” (ambassador) to “all of the marginalized ‘ghosts’ living on the periphery of modern civilization whose poignant suffering calls into question the dominant values undergirding neoliberal, consumer republics” (Le Clézio 182; qtd. in Moser 63). He is the representative of the other but not the only facade of it.

The marginal other has assembled many forms that align for their difference. It started with the marginalisation of women (Aristotle), the native inhabitants of the land, the Tricontinental (non-Western), or whoever falls distant from the preconceived idea of

the culturally standard. Some intentionally point the periphery towards those they consider as other "to efface their alterity and to assert cultural superiority" (Alber 9), yet it is not always the case. Through "Dodo", Le Clézio shares a list of those susceptible to othering, like "the diverse, misunderstood homeless community comprised of former veterans, immigrants, ethnic and moral minorities, and individuals who have a mental health disorder." (qtd. in Moser 79). Mental health disorders and diseases join the list of those who might be cast off the box of "fellow" for their difference.

Rowling goes specific and seems to make Newt Scamander the ambassador of a specific type of mental health disorder. We see that the beasts created in *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* represent the character of an autistic other, whose alterity is in being more fragmented and marvellously "fantastic" than his fellow beings. The author seems to map us a way into the life of an autistic person beyond the social prejudices that hangs around him. She describes them as fantastic and it is a way to deconstruct the old age fallacy on the monstrous nature of those perceived as others. We argue that she characterises Newt's beasts with specific traits that hint to his autistic nature. They all have a particular way of living and behaving around others; some are anti-social, shy, and a list of other physical and emotionally responsive characteristics.

Scamander's beasts are anti-social creatures, for they show more tendency to enjoy solitude to having to stay around others. *Erumpent* is a large grey African beast with great power; though nothing can physically threaten it, it prefers "broad, open" spaces (Rowling *Fantastic Beasts* 38). The *Nundu* is a "gigantic leopard", classified as more dangerous than an *Erumpent* (Scamander 31). When Newt and Jacob visit it in his habitat, they find him "stand[ing] proudly on a large rock, roaring at the moon" (Rowling *F.B.* 80). The moon often metaphorizes loneliness; however, this creature stands alone in the company of the moon "proudly" by means that it enjoys it. Even when visited, they spend but an instance enough to "scatter food at its feet" and leave it again to itself (80).

Sometimes, people meet these creatures, but they always manage to disappear off crowded settings. Individuals with autism usually feel uneasy around people; some even feel threatened by noisy places and crowds. Around "loud noises and moving objects", they panic and react "with horror" (qtd. in Wilkinson 02). Similarly, a *Demiguise* is a peaceful herbivorous beast that does not hesitate to vanish off a setting it feels threatened in. It has the power of invisibility which helps it refuse unwanted company. The *Diricawls*, "a plump-bodied... fightless bird", is also "remarkable for its method of escaping danger" (Scamander 09). Having it mentioned twice stresses an autistic habit of disliking and dismissing what they perceive as dangerous company. They prefer staying in their "cocoon", like the *Swooping Evil* creature, and only emerge when they feel comfortable. These creatures are anti-social, and sometimes they show more severe reactions to strangers.

Some autistic profiles have a smaller circle of comfort. Like *Occamies*, they tend to be aggressive towards whoever approaches them. It is mentioned that they "learn to defend themselves early"; hence, anyone *unfamiliar* is dangerous and unwelcomed (Rowling *F.B.* 80). The screenplay displays this when Newt introduces Jacob to his

*Thunderbird*, a very strong eagle-like beast yet extremely introverted. It gets agitated around others, which is why when Jacob approaches it, Newt asks him to step outside its personal space because it is “sensitive to strangers” (75-76).

Furthermore, *Augureys*, *Mooncalves*, and *Bowtruckles* are “intensely shy” (Scamander 3, 5, 29). Introversion is often mistaken for shyness; it happens when parents are convinced their child is shy wherein s/he shows early signs of developing introversion. *Augurey* is a thin and “mournful looking bird”, and it is so shy that it “flies only in heavy rain and otherwise remains hidden in its tear-shaped nest.” (03). Here it is not a matter of enjoying solitude but of not liking company in any form. It looks sad and what emphasises his “mournful look” is his “distinctive throbbing cry” (03). People have considered him a death caller, for whoever hears its cry is met with death news. Later, they scientifically figured out that it cries when it predicts rain and storms. The reason might not be in alarming others but about expressing its fear. While other beasts can speak, an *Augureys* is limited to cries, which allow others to put words into its mouth and label it to the dreadful act of summoning death. Autism is often associated with language disorders. They cannot speak or utter words, so they cry out or produce sounds to communicate, seeking comprehension. Parents or other members of society are not able to understand their child’s needs sometimes, so they try to interpret them.

*Mooncalf* is a friendly creature with big round eyes. It is so shy that it “emerges from its burrow only at the full moon”. In other words, it does not live around people and only opens up once when it is completely alone again. Another remarkable feature of this creature is its dance, which he performs in isolated areas under the moonlight (29). Parents often find their autistic child making repetitive moves that are rather complicated to their understanding, then realise the child was dancing (Myung-Ok Lee 18). People with autism think, speak and dance to their own rhythm. As argued by Myung-Ok Lee, to assume they are incapable of all the latter is fairly wrong (18). Referring to it as rhythm does not suggest it is slower in pace; instead, they do not meet the neurotypical, standard way of doing it. Like *Mooncalves*, *Billywigs* have their special way of moving; they are very fast and has wings on their head. It flies by rotating at a maximum speed. When seen, its repetitive moves metaphorically denote happiness, as if moving makes it so happy to the point of flying. Other creatures like the *Niffler*, though “gentle and affectionate”, can be very destructive (Scamander 30). *Niffler* loves shiny objects and can do anything to possess them. In the way, it causes a lot of damage, and Scamander describes him as “destructive to belongings”. While perceived as such, what it does is but its way of enjoying time, and gets protective against his personal space and belongings.

Scamander is affectionate about his creatures, and it appears they catch his sentiment and reverb it in their own way. When he enters the *Graphorns’* habitat with Jacob, the latter having never seen a large tiger-like creature at close, screams and tries to head back when Scamander stops and reassures him. As he greets them, a *Graphorn’s* “strange slimy tentacles rest on his shoulder, seeming to embrace him.”; it

communicates its emotion using a gesture only (Rowling *F.B.* 76). Individuals with autism are able of emotion though it might come confusing sometimes.

Studies explain that it is hard for persons with autism to read and produce facial expressions. Their facial expression codes differ from the typical responses seen every day. For instance, while a person might say "I'm happy" or smiles, an autistic individual would feel content yet s/he is less likely to express it "through facial expressions and language" ("Asperger Profiles" 02). However, there is always a way for mutual understanding to lurk in between, like communicating emotion through body language. It is easier for autistic children and adults alike since it hardly requires eye contact (Salvatore 10). That is how the *Griffon* shows its gratitude and love to Scamander, who does not wait for the creature to express itself the way others do but rather reaches out mid-way and interprets what he receives.

The "enchanted" case of Scamander is another word for special. Using metaphors, Rowling projects the life of an autistic person. There are three doors to perceiving someone with autism; from the outside, he looks different and is thus judged and labelled by others as "limited" and "less"; from a close stance, or best identified as parental, they fear that being around people who do not understand him would do him harm; and from the self-explanatory angle of who I am and what defines my autism in person. What is conceived as something "below" normal with four shortly-stretching limits is infinitely more when prejudice is put aside. Through his relationship with Jacob, we see what lies in his case, who they are; hence, who Scamander really is. From a closer stance, he is peaceful and shy, which is the one trait common among all beasts, as a means of emphasis. He is also anti-social and escapes unwanted, or as Rowling puts it, "dangerous" company, and it shows how insisting he is on his personal space. Sometimes, expressing his thoughts and emotions goes beyond words, making them subject to interpretation. He shows emotion in varied ways like going around in repetitive moves is his way of dancing and happily jumping around; destructing his belongings is a way of expressing his unwillingness to share; and a touch or hand on a shoulder is enough to express his love. Scamander's beasts offer an insider into the autistic person's life and traits, yet he also keeps some of them open to prejudice to warn against the dangers of the gaze.

### **Casualties of Monstrosity and the Aftermath of Alienation**

Society in the world of Rowling has a different structure; it consists of non-mags, mags, and magical creatures. Among the most important rules is never to practice or reveal magic in front of No-Majs because it is not "normal". There are two groups who show alterity; there are Newt's beasts who metaphor his autistic nature, and the other Majs of wizards and warlocks who are different for possessing magical abilities. In this section, we will see the difference between "monster" and "monstrous", and the consequence of societal rejection of the autistic specifically and the other generally.

Human nature tends to formulate what an "I" is and reinforce it with social laws to create groups of similar selves. Those who are seen as different are classified not as

an “other-self”, but as some “other” they cannot identify with. The latter concept means that what meets a self is strange and *unknown*, so it fears it which sometimes encourages its rejection.

Jacques Lacan (1901- 1981), in his theory of the unconscious, introduces the idea of Repression, Displacement, and Overcompensation. Starting with the repressed, it is not hiding, concealing or condensing an object down from the conscious to the unconscious, but the result of separating an idea from emotion. Nevertheless, he argues that emotion does not simply dissolve and is expressed differently elsewhere, which he calls displacement. It is the unconscious doing of feeling something outside the agency that created it in another context or against another object, that according to that person, is a similar substitute. The unconscious often manifests itself in meaningless dreams, like fearing a shoe or some subliminal monster that triggers a sense of a *deja-vue*. Overcompensation means seeking dominance over the object, by making it less to overcome the act of being or feeling less. Lacan describes these processes to be entirely personal.

To the human psyche, the unrecognised remains a mysterious evil, and to overcome what it generates of fear of the unknown, humans outcast it from the self then claim its inferiority to justify their domination and cruelty against it. The common feature in every unrecognised other is their alterity, which makes difference aligned with emotions like fear and followed by relegation. Seemingly, the unconscious series of displacement has always displayed the figure of a monster due to the negative emotion they sear, condemning every unrecognised self to a dehumanising monstrosity. These works of the unconscious mind only further question the nature of monsters; could monster and monstrous be synonymous terms of different morphological structures?

Before Lacan’s processes of the unconscious engine their effect, there initially comes meeting the unknown by means of the gaze. Since it cannot recognise its fellows, it ousters them and denies them any moral and ethical consideration. Derrida refers to this filtering action as “the monstrosity of the general singular” (qtd. in Hurst 122). It explains that the majority that defines the normative is monstrous for excluding those it does not recognise. Derrida argues that this exclusion is not left without dreadful continuation since “[t]he worst, the cruelest, the most human violence has been unleashed against living beings, beasts or humans, and humans in particular, who precisely were not accorded the dignity of being fellows” (108). To redefine it, “monster” should not stand for those seen as different but for those who are incapable of showing moral consideration. Moser brings about the example of Clézio and Derrida, underscoring that “the creation of ‘monsters’ allows people to absolve themselves of any moral responsibility whatsoever for the anguish felt by those who are perceived to be subhuman or somehow less than human.” (64). Monstrosity of the gaze justifies its cruelty to maintain hegemonic social construct.

In another account, some say that the creation of monsters mirrors their makers’ own account and capability of terror. It argues that if this modern monster literature were in the medieval and Early Modern eras, it “would have been considered more *threat*

than *thrill*. Rather than terrors *of* the imagination, monsters were seen as manifest terrors *from* the imagination." (Bromley 6; emphasis added in bold). It means to metaphorize that the beast is not what meets the eyes but that which lies inside. Bromley extends to examine *The Faerie Queene*, on which he suggests that Spenser uses "allegorical, visceral, and significant monsters intentionally as literary instruments of *pedagogy*, warning against the human capacity for bestial behavior" before "his readers were deformed by their own inherent corruption." (11; 20; *emphasis added*). Monsters are seen not only as a pedagogical tool to beware readers of their possible monstrosity but also as an implicit form of language that permits access to cultural norms. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen suggests a "method of reading cultures from the monsters they engender", in a way that they "ask us how we perceive the world, and how we have misrepresented what we have attempted to place.... to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance toward its expression" (3; 20). Again, it points back to the monstrosity of the gaze that drives its beholders below human and ethical decency. Monsters are then a constant reminder of one's own duality, ability of monstrosity, and a fair warning through the literary.

The consequence of the gaze and its works of overcompensation through dominion does not encourage those perceived as others to blend in easily. Contrarily, it draws them afar that they often prefer isolation to exposure to prejudiced eyes intent on verbalising it and carrying it out even physically. In *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them*, Newt hides his beasts or his different, autistic nature from the conventional human eye, knowing that the consequence of showing alteration from the standard leads to alienation, whose core element is the absence of ethical consideration.

The case is locked up on both ends; he neither allows people to discover its content, for he "discreetly flicks a brass dial to *MUGGLEWORTHY*" to magically showcase daily items (clothes and travel kit) instead, nor allows his creatures creep out before their arrival destination (Rowling *F.B.* 01). Only when no one is looking does he connect to its content; sometimes, he whispers to alarm them it is not safe yet. For instance, the reason why Newt visits New York is to set free a trafficked thunderbird, on which Jacob notices the marks of chains used to imprison it. Also, when Jacob hands Scamander the egg that fell off his case, he is genuinely happy and appreciative, adding that other people would have cracked the egg just to obtain its shell made of the purest silver on earth (80). In other words, he is afraid that humans would "exploit" these creatures without having to understand them, which is why he feels it is his duty to "[r]escue, nurture, and protect them, and... educate" his fellow wizards about them so they can do the same (76). When many creatures mistakenly leave the case, he expresses his urging need to find them "before they get hurt." (82). Though labelled as beasts, they are harmless creatures "in alien terrain, surrounded by millions of the most vicious creatures on the planet. Humans." (83- 84). In his opinion, humans are "vicious" because they would attack what they see as monsters, some "other" they fear, without intending to understand them first.

Even when he is not protecting them, most beasts are described as shy, wherein it is their inclination towards self-isolation. Their tendency to hide shows more explicitly in the description box of some beasts, like the *Bowtruckles*. Through it comes a very sensitive area of autism; societal behaviour towards individuals with autism. *Bowtruckles* are tree-guardian creatures; one named Pickett is Scamander's favourite. When Scamander leans towards the tree to put Pickett with its friends again, it refuses to jump off his hand. He explains to Jacob that it "has some attachment issues" (78), not to mean a bond towards its owner but its absence around its friends. In a conversing line, Scamander says to Pickett, "no, they are not going to bully you" for its "quirk" manners (78). Bullying is, to a great extent, "the embodiment of the brutality inflicted upon the monster" (Moser 78). It is very common among all ages, but it is the most dangerous against persons with autism.

Studies classify autism as a "hidden condition", meaning they look "normal" but act "weirdly" which is why neurotypical persons react aggressively against the former ones' distinct behaviour (Hebron 05). When not reported, bullying can affect the autistic child immensely and lead to "social isolation, rejection, and a lack of the supportive friendships that can protect against bullying" (01). According to Oswald, a therapist doctor, persons with autism "may lack the skills to self-advocate and report being bullied" (Oswald 07). In effect, bullying makes the possibility of developing future traumas very high. In the case of succeeding to report it, it is classified as experiencing "gaslighting", a form of emotional abuse (09). In the story, Puckett shows the same after-effect of being bullied, which is why he refuses to join his friends and favours his safety zone around Scamander. Lacan's form of displacement presents itself again when difference becomes a subject to bullying; with the reoccurrence of the repressed, the child or adult displaces their emotion of danger onto the idea of being around people generally. As a result, there will occur refusal of social contact altogether to avoid external danger, obliging alterity to seek refuge in isolation.

### ***From Alienating Autism to Alterity in General***

Going outside of the metaphoric to explicitly warn against the dangers of alienation is also plotted in the text. The form of marginalisation the "other" suffers from is bullying; one that seems but an immature verbal assault, generates tragic consequences. Besides Newt's autistic appearing beasts, there are other magical beings, that if they reveal difference, would be stricken off their fellowship.

Rowling's wizardry world has constructed a system maintained through its ministries to hide their reality by living in secrecy, avoiding contact, and acting normal. They reinforce it with magic by using enchanting or concealment spell to keep Maj properties invisible, memory charms when No-Majs witness magic to wipe off their memory, and concealments to control the beasts around their area off No-Maj discovery. It is a duty, if forsaken, will heavily be consequent by the ministry.

The reason they avoid contact with No-Majs is the history of hatred and massacres they share, whose primary trigger and fuel is fear of the magic they perceive as dangerous

mystery. According to H. P. Lovecraft, "[t]he oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown" (01). Persons imagine the worst scenarios, for they are aware there exists horror beyond their knowledge and experiences. Carleton, a professor in Psychology at the University of Regina, further asserts this statement adding that "fear of the unknown maybe a, or possibly the, fundamental fear" (5). He argues it is inherent and the source and prior trigger of all fears.

In the "absence of information", the "intolerance of uncertainty" urges the human mind to fill the gaps for its conceptualisation (Carleton 5). Since fear is a negative feeling, they assimilate negativity to the unknown. In Rowling's realm, No-Majs consider magic bad, so all those who practice it are deemed evil, leading to massive massacres where No-Majs were burning wizards in the Middle Ages. Although the latter managed to develop Flame-Freezing charms to survive the burning stick, some "fellow" No-Majs were mistaken for wizards and had to endure their fate. They exterminated them, thinking if they narrowed their numbers, that should reduce the danger. Unable to unravel its mystery, No-Majs feared magic, so they established enough power to rule over its practitioners.

Besides, No-Majs make the majority of society compared to wizards. In the *Harry Potter* series, the wizard Ronald Weasley states that "[m]ost wizards these days are half-blood anyways. If we hadn't married Muggles we'd've died out" (Rowling *HP* 181). The disparity in number hegemonically establishes a group on the expense of the other, making those who fit the characteristics of the majority "us", and those who do not the outcasted "them". Even though the minority possesses magic which connotes power, they are rendered into "the other as in inferior, not as in fascinating" (Jensen 65). In othering wizards, No-Majs establish what Lister calls a "process of differentiation and demarcation" (Lister 10). He explains that when a social group identifies another group (minority) as different, they try to maintain social distance from them. According to Spivak's analysis, there are three dimensions of othering; "making the subordinate aware of who holds power", "constructing the other as pathological and morally inferior", and possessing "knowledge and technology" (qtd. in Jensen 64-65). The second and most prevalent form of demarcation in the book is labelling the other as "morally inferior", which reduces them to "dehumanized" beings in contrast to the human majority (qtd. in Jensen 65). They dehumanise them to emphasise their distinct humanness and justified cruelty.

Beyond fear and hegemonic practices, No-Majs indoctrinated hatred to the culture of the other. From a No-Maj viewpoint, wizards "are plainly outcasts and comfortable with being so. Nothing is more unnerving to the truly conventional than the unashamed misfit!" (Rowling "R.H.M." 01). In their opinion, Majs are "outcasts" and should fight their difference. Their expression is full of negative prefixes, like "out", "un", and "mis", extending opposition to language. They describe convention as sacred, which is why seeing wizards careless about meeting it is profane and unacceptable to them. They also express that wizardry lifestyle is what they fear to be if they ever morally fall down



the ruins of civilisation. With such “medieval” statements passed down for generations, they make sure to keep hegemony to their advantage (04). Notwithstanding the Maj’s absent attempts to follow the standards, the No-Maj’s not only alienate them but also rally to expose their secret society and kill them by holding campaigns to warn the public against magic, the evil living among them (Rowling *F.B.* 14-16). Living peacefully to the Maj society is living in secrecy from the gaze; others, however, surrender to its fallacy. This thrust of identity causes them mental displacement, which they call *Obscurus*.

An *Obscurus* is “a type of magical parasite that forms when a wizard or warlock suppresses their magical ability” (Shamsian 03). If a magical person does not perform his magic and forces it from showing, he becomes an *Obscurial*, a vessel to self-contained abilities that grow until it kills him. The first *Obscurus* mentioned is seen in Scamander’s case when Jacob enters its habitat and Scamander nervily orders him to step back (Rowling *F.B.* 81-82). Although it is old and harmless at its age, it still poses a threat.

In the other part of New York, another *Obscurus* is growing inside a teenager. He is the orphan son of Mary Lou Barebone, the furious, anti-witchcraft activist. He grows to hate magic from the demonising stories she always tells him, so he contained it for too long that it became destructible. His *Obscurus* was released by an evil wizard who wanted to reverse hegemonic order. Intent to intrigue it, he misguided the boy to fight and restrain it within; eventually, the rage of the *Obscurus* destroyed and killed people. In other words, what was an attempt to fit in society destroyed him instead.

Magical persons force themselves into looking normal because they cannot sustain the look of society upon them. In the series’ history, an unrecognised *Obscurus* appeared before in Dumbledore’s sister. Her siblings describe that it started one time when she was bullied and violented by other children for her difference. She decided never to use magic again and be “normal”. Her brother adds how “[s]he wouldn’t use magic, but she couldn’t get rid of it; it turned inward and drove her mad... and at times she was strange and dangerous. But mostly she was sweet and scared and harmless.” (Armitage “This Fantastic Beasts Fans Theory” 06). Hiding her abilities is synonymous to raging war against her nature, which was at the expense of her mother’s life and her own destruction.

The danger of suppressing oneself and having to endure self-alienation develops various psychological issues. In her research, Jackson (1983) synthesises that alienation is the consequential negative effect of being othered. Being rejected and addressed as different by fellow social beings develops an identity crisis, which she terms “alienness” (Jackson 15). In its broad meaning, alienation runs to,

‘Every direction of human experience where basic emotional desire is frustrated, every direction in which the person may be compelled by social situations to do violence to his own nature. ‘Alienation’ is used to convey the emotional tone that accompanies any behavior in which the person is compelled to act self-destructively.’ (Feuer 95-96).

Persons deemed different try to change to fit more within social groups. It sometimes runs to entrapping and oppressing one's emotions and thoughts that constitute their being. When the person does not meet instant results, he blames his nature and tries to oppress himself harder while he rejects the persons who suggest otherwise, which causes them clinical alienation, not as a feeling but a mental illness.

To Scamander, *Obscures* were more common in the past when magical persons had to hide their abilities, fearing for their lives. It symbolises the inner struggle one feels within society, consequent to othering and rejection. Difference could be in magic or any individual that does not fit the *generic* image of the “standard” self. Alienation is closely related to ASD, for it often develops in autistic persons within themselves and surrounding. It can malignly develop into a disorder when it is between parent and child, called PAS (Parental Alienation Syndrome).

*Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* does not settle for introducing autism in a humanised image before the occurrence of any prevailing counter-narrative. It also reaches out to every dehumanised other to restore them their dignity and right to the same moral consideration as their recognised fellows. Newt hides and isolates his autistic being because he knows he would be alienated and victimised. He also offers a list of other persons whose alterity does not meet the typical. Aware as he is, Newt, an autistic individual, does not allow the prejudices of his society to affect his personality, yet he thinks it is wise to isolate himself (and beasts) because they are vicious. Rowling provides another example of those who are unaware and allow external prejudice to mirror how they see themselves. With the majority rallying against their difference in the form of bullying, they fall into the trap of self-alienation.

## Conclusion

Illness has often been metaphorically referred to as “monster” for its devious nature. Since autism is the new literary illness, at first it seems to fall under its definition and both collapse within the confines of the same image. Nonetheless, the representation of autism in *Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them* is character-centred rather than a literary tool of narration and a thematic plot twist. It does not represent *autism* as a consequence of an event but gives audiences access to the life of an *autistic person*. It describes how society sees him, who he really is, and the danger that his fellow humans put him into. His suitcase metaphors his mind; while its square shape depicts external prejudice against him, its inhabitants describe his true self. They are shy and express themselves differently, which exposes them to bullying by those who “gaze” them as “monstrous”. The way Rowling uses “beast” throws tribute to Derrida's lectures on binary thinking, in which he calls for the deconstruction of the “other” that would allow a way back from dehumanising them. Her choice to metaphor through “beast” seems as a means to reduce the rhetorical element around the term and relate it to the existence of hegemonic practices in society against alterity. In humanising Newt's difference, Rowling is erasing the existence of monsters from monstrous classification

and redefines monster” as that marvellous creature who is different in a fantastic way. However, she has displayed that image because persons have been accustomed to labelling difference as “monster” in an attempt to reformulate it in the minds of young readers.

The consequence of outcasting those who are different can negatively affect them, leading to self-alienation. It proves with most of Newt’s beasts’ inclination towards isolation, and with magical persons’ growth of *Obscurials* which is the magi-fied form of self-alienation. Every alterity or newness in society goes through the same process of being from unrecognised, othered or perceived monstrous, to alienated and cast off social norms. They are made uneasy under their skin and like an *Obscurial*, it causes them serious mental illnesses, among which alienation is prior in mention. The books attempt to meet the literary with the reality of an autistic person, as it provides a confident person who embraces his alterity, all while warning against the dangers of excluding it. This scope makes Rowling’s work an “ambassador” for the autist, one that represents them as characters that readers could relate to and understand, and a novelty beyond the tradition of representing illness as an element of writing whose effect is also “obscurial”. This way, she not only provides a literary representative of the autistic but a pedagogical work that helps readers reconstruct their ideas of fellowship and subjectivity.

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