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Title:

**The intersection of disability and marginalization in Doris
Lessing's *The fifth child* (1988) and Raquel Jaramillo
Palacio's *Wonder* (2012)**

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To my mother EL-Djoher ABBAS

To my father Kaci

To my brother Amine and my sister Wissal

To my family and friends

And in the memory of my grandparents

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Declaration

The methodology courses taken in my class during the academic year 2021–2022 are followed in the following dissertation. As a result, it exhibits some differences in terms of form from other Master's dissertations that were previously carried out in our department. In fact, it does not use the Chicago style but rather adheres to the guidelines established by the American Psychological Association (APA).

Abstract

The present study has investigated the intersection of disability and marginalisation that exists in Doris Lessing's *The fifth child* (1988) and Raquel Jaramillo Palacio's *Wonder* (2012). My aim in the research paper has been to shed light on the relationship between disability and marginalisation through the characters' experiences in both novels, as well as the way this relationship affected the household members. In order to reach my objective, I have employed two main theories which are Tobin Siebers's *Disability theory* (2008) and Peter Burke's *Brothers and sisters of disabled children* (2004) accompanied by a supportive one which is Lennard J. David's *Disability studies reader* (2006). The aforementioned theories are suitable for my study since they provide with the necessary concepts which are disability and marginalisation. Throughout my analysis, I have come to two major findings. First, disabled people are seen as burden because of their impairment; thus, they become marginalized by society and family. Second, disability does not only affect the person who carries it, but also his surroundings, and more specifically his siblings. The dissertation is divided into two major chapters; the first chapter has strived to explain the way and the reason as well as the consequences of disability and marginalisation that occurs on the disabled protagonists. The second chapter has attempted to define the consequences of disability on the siblings of the disabled child and their parents. Ultimately, I have come up to the conclusion that the societal stereotypes are the ones that determine a person's ability and disability.

Keywords: disability, marginalisation, ability, social model, family.

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I. General Introduction:

Having witnessed the struggles that my brother has gone through in his childhood as a temporarily disabled person made me realise how challenging it was for him to face society. His hardships and the way people treated him are what sparked my interest in disability studies. To extend my knowledge, I have started watching and reading about disability studies and the role of disabled people in society, until I came across a movie entitled *Wonder* (2017) directed by Stephen Chbosky, which is in fact the adaptation of a novel carrying the same title written by the American author Raquel Jaramillo Palacio and it is published in (2012). In addition, throughout Professor SIBER's lectures, I have been introduced to the module of contemporary British literature in which we have dealt with a novel entitled *The fifth child* (1988) written by Doris Lessing. It got my attention from the first reading, and later on, I have recognized the resemblance between these two novels.

This research paper then explores the intersection of disability, marginalization and the way they are portrayed in both Doris Lessing's *The fifth child* (1988) and Raquel Jaramillo Palacio's *Wonder* (2012). The reason that has pushed me to undertake such a comparative study stems first from my interest in the field of comparative literature. Second, in exploring the two works together, I have come to see the great literary similarity between the two aforementioned works in terms of characterization and themes. Eventually, I have chosen these texts as primary sources because, after an in-depth reading, I have realized that they perfectly present the topic I am pursuing.

Both novels belong to contemporary literature writing, which makes them comparable. The fact that *The fifth child* is considered as a British work and *Wonder* as an American one does not prevent them from conveying similar themes. While English writers often emphasize their cultures and manners, exemplified by *The fifth child's* portrayal of the challenges faced by

the Lovatts couple as they adhere to their cultural norms and marry early, American writers tend to place greater emphasis on social issues. This can be observed in *Wonder*, where the novel explores society's reaction to August, the young boy with facial differences, highlighting the impact of societal perceptions on an individual's self-esteem and acceptance. Through their narratives, both novels shed light on the complexities of human relationships, the struggles faced by individuals in different societal contexts, and the significance of empathy and understanding. Despite their distinct national origins, these contemporary works of literature link universal themes that transcend borders, inviting readers to reflect on shared experiences and fostering a greater appreciation for the diversity of human stories.

As a matter of fact, there is a remarkable disagreement about the rise of contemporary literature. On one side, some argue that it emerged in the immediate aftermath of World War II (1939_1945); and on the other side, others contend that it took shape a decade or two later. The main purpose of the works of contemporary literature is to echo the social and/or the political views of a society where authors seek issues that bring to light the strengths and the weaknesses to remind the society of the lessons they should learn and the questions they should ask. Eventually, since society changes over time, the content of the written works also changes; therefore, contemporary literature does not only focus on specific themes or scenarios (Carnevale & Kaitlyn, 2022, para. 2-3). In this sense, contemporary literature acts as a mirror of society, reflecting the ever-changing social, cultural, and political landscapes. It captures the complexities, contradictions, and aspirations of the present era, providing readers with a deeper understanding of the world they inhabit. By engaging with the pressing concerns of their time, contemporary authors contribute to the ongoing dialogue about societal progress, individual identity, and the human experience in a rapidly evolving world.

Review of the Literature:

The two selected novels are well-known and have won numerous awards. On the one hand, Doris Lessing's *The fifth child* won the Nobel Prize for Literature in (2007), and on the other hand, *Wonder*, Palacio's debut novel, has been awarded as the multi-million copy *New York Times* bestseller along with the Maine Student Book award in (2014). This explains why they have been studied from various perspectives by many researchers and scholars as well as the large number of reviews and critics that are available on them.

Daniel Sullivan and Jeff Greenberg's *Monstrous children as harbingers of mortality: A psychological analysis of Doris Lessing's the fifth child* (2013) examines the novel from a psychological perspective. It relies on *Terror management theory* (TMT) which is a psychology theory that investigates how people manage with their own mortality and the fear of death. According to (TMT), humans have an inherent fear of death which creates existential anxiety. He used this theory to demonstrate its applicability on the case of monstrous children in the horror genre. The authors used the aforementioned theory in comparison to Kristeva's theory of *Abjection* with the intention to shed light on the complexity of the monstrous child as a symbolic figure, in addition to exploring the richness of Lessing's novel. As a result, relying on Kristeva's theory, it becomes clear that the novel is a literary exploration of the socially conditioned aspect of maternity, whereas, according to the TMT study, Harriet's experience as the mother of an abject child is out of the question. They argue, Lessing's "*attention to Ben's physical ambiguity highlights the evil child's power to disturb by reminding us of our animal, and thus mortal, nature.*" (p. 108) Furthermore, applying the TMT on *The fifth child* leads to the realisation that monstrous children are particularly a source of terror because they turn what is typically the foundation of the parents' pursuit of immortality into an embodied symbol of the parents' mortality.

Taous Igoudjil's *The intersection of disability issue and feminism in Doris Lessing's the*

fifth child (1988) and its sequel Ben, in the World (2000) analyses the intersection of both feminism and disability issues. Igoudjil investigates how women and disabled people share the same fate of being marginalized and alienated by both society and family. She relies on Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's *Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory* (2011). In the first chapter, Igoudjil scrutinizes how the disabled are perceived and treated by society. She claims, "*Lessing condemns the society's behaviors towards the disabled and claims the need to accept their difference and integrate them as normal humans*" (p. 28). In the second chapter, she focused on femininity and how it is celebrated through contemporary feminism. In the last chapter, she probes the common features or the interaction of both disability concerns and feminism, and the perception of society of disabled children and women. After examining these novels, it becomes clear that Lessing's works serve as examples of how the integration of disabled persons symbolizes the evolution of feminism in society.

In *The Influence of Female Characters to the Development of Auggie in Palacio's Wonder* (2020), Yosevin Putrihadi explores Palacio's *Wonder* where he focuses on two points. The first part of this thesis examines the characterization of August Pullman, the protagonist, and the other three female characters: his mother Isabel, his sister Olivia and his best friend Summer Dawson, and the impact that all of them have on August. The second part focuses on analysing the influence of those three females' characters on August's development, applying various theories: the theory of *characterisation* by Murphy, the theory of *personality development* by Hurlock, the theory of *parental influences* by Murray and Seghorn, the theory of *siblings* by Jenkins and the theory of *friendship* by Bukatko. Thus, it can be said that "*Auggie's personality develops because of the four conditions, such as changes in environment, significant people, social pressure, and strong motivations*" (p. xi). Moreover, the three female characters encourage August in these four cited conditions, which contributes simultaneously to achieving his development.

Tania Silviana's *The characterization analysis of August Pullman in Wonder* written by R.J. Palacio (2019) examines August Pullman from a psychoanalytical perspective relies on Carl Jung's *introversion* and *extraversion*. Silviana explores how August succeeds in shifting his status from an introvert person to an extrovert. She argues, "*to be socially accepted, one does not need to change who they really are*" (p. 39). As a result, August's mindset and characterization are there as on for the improvement and the change in his life.

Issue and Working Hypothesis:

From the above review of Literature, it is made clear that there are former researchers that have studied the novels from different perspectives. Some of the studies have explored the psychological side of the characters, while others focused on the sociological one. However, to the best of my understanding, there has been no study conducted thus far that explores the intersection of disability and marginalization, which serves as a common thread linking the two novels. Therefore, this research paper aims to fill that gap and make a valuable contribution to the field by investigating the relationship between these concepts and their impact on both the family and society at large. Moreover, this study aims to examine the experiences and challenges faced by families who navigate the complexities of raising a child with a disability in their respective cultural and social contexts. It seeks to highlight the social, emotional, and practical implications that arise from such circumstances and the broader societal responses to disability.

While analysing the novels, my aim is to delve into the concepts of disability and marginalization to discover the relation between them. Therefore, I relied on Tobin Siebers' *Disability theory* (2008) in my first chapter in order to explain more the concepts' definition, causes and consequences. Secondly, I focused on Peter Burke's *Brothers and sisters of disabled children* (2004) to reveal the real relationship between disabled children and their

siblings and how this relationship affects family members. However, calling for a supporting theory is necessary to reinforce my discussion of the two novels and their characterisation and themes. Wherefore I am relying on Lennard Davis's *The disability studies* (2006) to support the main theories since it is a compatible theory and also to explain the similarities between the two novels.

The concepts of disability and marginalization can be linked to the characters' experiences of otherness within both their family and society, stemming from their disabilities. This impact extends beyond the individuals themselves, affecting their siblings and those in their immediate surroundings. Consequently, it becomes crucial to thoroughly analyze these characters through the lens of disability and marginalization. It is important to recognize that the suffering caused by disability is not limited to the disabled individuals alone but also extends to their familial and societal networks. Although the stories depicted in the novels are fictional and not based on real-life events, they still serve as a reflection of social issues and problems. Through the exploration of these narratives, a good understanding can be gained regarding the intricate relationship between disability and marginalization. These literary works provide valuable insights into how social issues contribute to the marginalization of individuals with disabilities, allowing for a comprehensive examination of these themes and their impact on both personal and societal levels.

Methodological outline:

The primary objective of this study is to examine the intersection of disability and marginalization in the selected novels. The aim is to identify and highlight the similarities that exist between the two narratives concerning these concepts. Specifically, the focus will be on the protagonists, Ben and August, who share the common experience of being marginalized by their families and society due to their disabilities. Additionally, the study will address the issue

of marginalization experienced by the healthy siblings in relation to their disabled brother and parents. In studying the similarities between the two books, I intend to divide my dissertation into two chapters. The first chapter will focus on introducing the disabilities of the main characters, then outline the way they were marginalised by society and family, and eventually, I will tackle how the characters fight to demarginalize themselves from the social stereotypes. In the second chapter, I will delve into the concept of marginalization in relation to Ben's and August's siblings to understand the lack of attention from the parents. The chapter will also shed light on the impact of the disabled child on their siblings, in addition to how the family and society treat these non-disabled children.

II. Methodology:

In conducting this research paper, I mainly adopted two initial theories to analyse the two works; which are Tobin Sieber's *Disability theory* (2008) along with Peter Burke's *Brothers and sisters of disabled children* (2004). Furthermore, for more understanding, I ought to rely on another supporting theory named *The disability study* by Lennard J. Davis (2006). The use of these theories will help to understand better the interconnected relationship between disability and marginalization and how they work altogether in relation to the novels' characterization and themes. The chosen theories form a suitable collection on the level of concepts, as well as they explain deeply those concepts that are more than necessary in analysing the novels.

1. Tobin Siebers's *Disability theory*:

Siebers (2008) raises some issues that are related to disability studies. He analyses the tension between the social model of disability and the material details of impairment addressing how disability theory and other forms of critical theory can challenge and inform one another, and how identity politics can move the disability rights movement forward. According to Siebers (2008), "*as a matter for medical intervention, disability has been described more recently in disability studies as a minority identity that must be addressed not as a personal misfortune or individual defect but as the product of disabling social and built environment*" (p. 3). Through this definition, it is understandable that Siebers (2008) claims that even though disability is considered as a medical intervention, it is also seen as a constructed notion by society more than a fact, which means that it is not an identity for a particular person but a given one by society.

Many stereotypes have been constructed by society to picture mental or physical disabilities. Disabled people are mainly considered as the second-class citizens and they

eventually become the image of alienation or *the other*. In addition to this, disability is seen as a sickness and an abnormality that need to be fixed or cured, but what we do not know is that disabled people are compensated for their disability by greater abilities and powers in other areas that may be sometimes beyond the ordinary.

a. Sieber's ideology of ability:

Sieber explains the ideology of ability to demonstrate how it functions, and to remove the disability from the ideology of ability's shadow. He also wants to raise awareness of disability and to shed light on its various forms, ideals, and realities. He also sheds light on the difference between disability and ability. He argues that the difference

may be grasped superficially in the idea that disability is essentially a "medical matter," while ability concerns natural gifts, talents, intelligence, creativity, physical prowess, imagination, dedication, the eagerness to strive, including the capacity and desire to strive-in brief, the essence of the human spirit. (p. 9)

In other words, disability is supposed to be a medical concern rather than a social judgement on disabled people. However, others see it as an impairment because able-bodied people can do whatever they want while those with disabilities cannot.

b. Sieber's minority identity:

Sieber (2008) has dealt with the rejection of the minority to explain the relationship between identity and minority and how they work together. Siebers (2008) defines the minority identity as:

a product of damage inflicted systematically on a people by a dominant culture, is rearticulated by the suffering group as self-affirming, but because the identity was born of suffering, it is supposedly unable to shed its pain, and this pain soon comes to justify feelings of selfishness, resentment, bitterness, and self-pity-all of which combine to justify the oppression of other people. (p. 13)

In other words, minority identity is reliable to a socially constructed notion that dominates people with special needs who cannot fully depend on themselves, which means that any small group of disabled people is automatically rejected by society. However, according to Siebers

(2008), contemporary theorists identify identity as “*not merely a liability but a disability*” (p. 15) because whenever it is related to weakness and dependence, it is seen as a disability.

2. Peter Burke’s *Brothers and sisters of disabled children*:

Burke’s theory (2004) introduces several chapters in his book studying and discussing some topics related to the major concept of disability within a family. He examines how having a disabled child can affect the family and more specifically with reference to his brothers and sisters, as he introduces the challenges that may face the family during their life in raising both abled and disabled children at the same time, and how this disability can influence on siblings’ childhood and personality. I have selected the following chapter from Burke’s book for the purpose of applying it on my study since it explains the relation between the family members which I’m discussing in my second chapter.

The impact of disability on the family according to Burke:

In this chapter from *Brothers and sisters of children with disabilities* (2004), Burke examines the real impact or effect of giving birth to a disabled child in a family, insisting on the way their siblings react or feel with the arrival of their new-born disabled sibling. The author claims that the non-disabled children may be considered as secondary carers of their disabled siblings, yet parents are considered as the ‘*main carers*’ of the disabled children, as the following statement explains it well:

Siblings within the family may also be involved in caring responsibilities, looking after their disabled brother or sister, and consequently the role of siblings as carers is also discussed but separately from that of parents as the primary or main carers. (p. 41)

This means that the parents are the ones who are supposed to take care of their disabled children in the first place. However, the siblings found themselves playing the role of carer and taking responsibility for their disabled sibling.

3. Lennard J. Davis's *Disability studies reader* (2006):

The social model of disability:

The social model of disability emerged as an opposing reaction to the medical model; it was first introduced by the British sociologist and disability rights activist, Michael Oliver in 1983. The medical model perceives disability as something that originates in one's body or mind and believes that medical interventions may assist in reducing the impact of that disability or completely cure it. However, the social model claims that disability is a social constructed notion that prevents the disabled people from participating in specific tasks or activities in society.

In another claim, Davis stresses the fact that it is up to society to change its way of seeing people with impairment as disabled individuals, and rather find ways to eliminate those disabling barriers so that people with disabilities could work alongside their non-disabled peers, noting that: "*it is not the disabled person who is to blame, but society. She does not have to change, society does*" (p. 200). In brief, the social model activists reclaim a "*barrier removal, anti-discrimination legislation, independent livings and other responses to social oppression*" (p. 199). In other words, it is needed for the social barriers to be removed in order that people with disability can finally be independent and equal in society and participate in any given social activity just like everyone else.

4. Medical concepts:

To better understand how disabled characters act and think, we must first learn about the nature and severity of their disability. This awareness will enhance the discussion with scientific information and aid in the analysis of the characters' manners and ways of thinking. It is also a medical method that may justify their actions and decisions.

a. Asperger's Syndrome:

According to the *Dictionary of medical terms*, Asperger's Syndrome is defined as a “developmental disorder characterized by difficulty in social interaction and a restricted range of interests, more common in boys than girls” (p. 29). It affects the child's ability to socialize and communicate effectively with others. The most known symptoms that may present in children with Asperger's can be seen as having poor intelligence, showing fewer facial expressions than others and may exhibit signs of social isolation, and having trouble controlling emotions which occasionally cause harmful behaviours. In fact, most individuals with Asperger's Syndrome are of above-average intelligence and their abilities to communicate are comparatively poor.

b. Treacher Collins Syndrome:

Millions of individuals worldwide are affected by a multitude of rare diseases and according to the National Organization of Rare Disorders

Treacher Collins syndrome (TCS) is a rare genetic disorder characterized by distinctive abnormalities of the head and face. Craniofacial abnormalities tend to involve underdevelopment of the zygomatic complex, cheekbones, jaws, palate and mouth which can lead to breathing and feeding difficulties. (para. 1)

Besides this, we cannot neglect the psychological effects that Treacher Collins Syndrome has on the disabled or the family members since it may provoke feelings of anxiety and depression. However, the psychological problems that are related to the mental status of the disabled can cause him to be alienated from his society because of perceived unattractive personality traits or behaviours. This syndrome can also cause, in the short-term, anger, sadness, fear, and feelings of helplessness in being an active and productive member of the community.

5. A brief biography of Doris Lessing and a short synopsis of *The fifth child*

Doris May Lessing (1919-2013) is a British-Zimbabwean novelist. She was born in Persia and then moved with her parents to Rhodesia (Zimbabwe now) in 1925. She was educated until the

age of 13 when she started self-educating ever since. Besides, she started writing at the age of 15. Because of her literary works, she won the 2007 Nobel Prize for lifetime writing that broke both social and artistic traditions. Among her various books, we have *The fifth child* which is first published in 1988 in the United Kingdom. The book is a short novel about the conservative, family-oriented British couple Harriet and David Lovatt who plan to have as many children as they can in a big house full of life despite their inadequate financial resources. After having four healthy children in quick succession, they eventually without intention, give birth to the monstrous Ben who fractures the whole family members after they were once all united on almost every occasion in that big house.

Ben is referred to as a goblin, monster and beast since he is a baby for both his physical appearance and attitude. Regardless of the attention that the parents give to Ben, he is unable to relate or connect with anyone. Because of his aggressive manners, it is highly doubtful that he killed a cat and a dog, as he also hurt his brother Paul and a girl in his school. For the sake of the family, Ben is institutionalized despite Harriet's opposition. The family's happiness is briefly restored but only for a short-term period before Harriet brings him home regardless of his bad impact on the family. After Ben's return, Harriet tries her best to teach Ben how to communicate again, but it is late because the other siblings are unable to adjust to his return and find the means to leave home. Because of the marginalization, Ben's siblings whether move in with their grandparents or enrol in boarding school, unless Paul, the most damaged one, stays at home. The life the Lovatts once enjoyed fails as David becomes increasingly estranged and lonely, and Harriet is condemned by her family.

Ben enrolls in school and makes several pals with whom he starts to hang out a lot, especially with John. As the years go by, Ben starts attending high school and begins hanging out with a group of teenagers who have similar issues as him. In the end, after the separation of all the Lovatts' children, David keeps pleading with Harriet to leave the house and let go of

their idealistic childhood dream of a big and happy house. She eventually accepted the inevitable seeing that Ben is fully integrated into the group he hangs out with.

6. A brief biography of Raquel J. Palacio and a short synopsis of *Wonder*

Raquel Jaramillo Palacio (1963) is an American author who was born in New York City, and is the writer of *Wonder*. The novel is not based on a real story but instead, it was inspired by an incident where the author's son started to cry after noticing a girl with a severe facial deformity, she says in an interview "*I realized afterward that I had handled the situation terribly. What I wished I had done was to turn that encounter into a teaching moment for my kids*". However, instead of remaining regretful, she wrote the novel in the name of all disfigured children. Moreover, the title of the novel was inspired by the song "Wonder" by Natalie Merchant which speaks about people who grew up with special needs.

The story is told by many characters about the protagonist August Pullman, a boy with a physical deformity on the face who lives in New York City with his parents, his elder sister Via, and a small dog named Daisey. August is shocked when he has learned from his parents that he has been registered for fifth grade at a nearby school called Beecher Preparatory after being home- schooled for four years. He, at first, refuses to go to school, but after a brief tour with other children, he decided to give it a try. At school, August befriends Jack, a kid who attends many of the same classes as him, and Summer, a girl with whom he shares a lunchtime friendship. Julian, a prominent student, teases August and shares false information about him with others.

Halloween excites August because he can cover his face from everyone, but it becomes a nightmare when he arrives at school and hears Jack disparaging him to some boys which ruins their relationship. In the meantime, Summer is judged about hanging out with August at a popular young party, but she leaves the gathering and prefers to stay friends with him. On the

other hand, Jack is perplexed about why August ceased being his friend, but when he discovers that August overheard his disrespectful words, he regrets his behavior and tries to make amends. Jack becomes a partner with August for the science fair project after he rejected Julian. After the class, Julian becomes angry and teases Jack who punches him later. However, August and Jack rekindle their bond, but Julian shuns Jack and informs the majority of the guys to stop talking to him. Most of the boys eventually turn against Julian and begin introducing themselves to Jack and August. When the class is out camping, the seventh graders from another school shove August one night, but Jack and a few other lads fight back and defend August.

On the other side of the story, Via enrolls in a new high school, but she finds it difficult to adjust because her old friends are with different mindsets and she is compelled to find new ones. She met Justin who becomes her boyfriend and the one who defends once on Jack. Even though she is merely an understudy in the play she is performing, Via invites the family to her play and does a fantastic job when her best friend Miranda leaves her place for her. In the end, in recognition of August's perseverance throughout the academic year and the influence he had on other pupils, he receives the Henry Ward Beecher medal during the school graduation ceremony.

III. Results and Discussion

Shedding the light on the similarities between Doris Lessing's *The fifth child* (1988) and Raquel Jaramillo Palacio's *Wonder* (2012) in reference to the concepts of disability and marginalisation has been the subject of my research paper. However, to fully grasp its extent, I have relied on three books which are: the two primary sources: Tobin Siebers's *Disability theory* (2008), Lennard J. David's *Disability studies reader* (2006) and the supportive one of Peter Burke's *Brothers and sisters of disabled children* (2004). It is remarkable in both novels that Lessing and Palacio have portrayed the life of disabled children Ben and August, and the challenges they face throughout their life. In addition, we can also notice that even though these disabled children are marginalized, they become capable to mark their place in society. However, the consequences of disability did not occur only on the children who carry it, but also on the household members. As one can see, even healthy children are marginalized by their parents, despite their abilities.

Throughout my analysis of the novels, I have relied on the concepts of disability and marginalisation which helped to introduce the protagonists' disabilities in order to understand the way and the reason of their marginalisation by society and family. In addition, the focus is also on the shifts that occurs in Ben's and August's daily life because of the neglect they are subjected to. I have come up to the result that disability is more of a social model than it is a medical one. This is the reason why the protagonists, Ben and August, share similar circumstances in being bullied and marginalised. One may also deduce that the neglect received by the disabled children affects their life negatively both inside and outside their house, and that prevents them from having a normal childhood as that of other children. Eventually, it is concluded that both protagonists did not stand idly in front of the oppression and inequality that were occurred on them.

In the other section of this research paper, I have relied more on the concept of marginalisation to examine the relation between disabled children with their siblings, mainly in reference to disability. Furthermore, I have explored the way parents have treated their healthy children in the presence of the disabled ones, as well as the response of the healthy children to this neglect. In view of what has been analysed, I have concluded that both Ben's and August's siblings have faced the same fate of being overshadowed as a result of the parents' failure in providing equal attention and affection to them and to their disabled brothers. As we have seen, the children who do not have special needs are enraged by the inability to do so. In fact, they become resentful of their disabled brothers as well as toward their parents for neglecting their needs in favour of their siblings.

Chapter One: Disability issue in Doris Lessing's *The fifth child* (1988) and Raquel J. Palacio's *Wonder* (2012)

The overall chapter's objective is to shed light on disability issue that exists in both Doris Lessing's *The Fifth Child* (1988) and Raquel J. Palacio's *Wonder* (2012). The discussion of the novels starts by introducing the disabilities of the protagonists Ben and August, as well as explaining the way and the reason why they ended up marginalised and otherised by both family and society. Furthermore, I intend to demonstrate the consequences of both and marginalisation that occurs to the protagonists. Ultimately, my goal is to investigate how the characters fight to surpass these conditions and obstacles in order to live an ordinary life as that of the other children. Through an in-depth analysis, the chapter aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of disability and the resilience demonstrated by the characters in their quest for acceptance and inclusion.

Introducing the notions of disability and marginalisation is essential before diving into the analysis of the novels' study. Understanding these concepts allows us to extract the relation between them as well as the way they affect on the life of the characters in the novels. We have first, disability, which is according to the *Dictionary of medical terms* (2004), a condition in which a part or some parts of the body does not function in the usual way. Thus, it makes doing some activities difficult or even impossible. However, as Lennard (2006) elucidates: "*At the heart of disability studies is a recognition that disability is a cultural construction*" (p. 17) which shows that disability is not always related to a physical or mental one but it can be also a notion created by the society that leads most of the time to marginalise the disabled people.

Second, marginalisation is when someone or a group of individuals are excluded from some facets of society because of many reasons such as their ethnicity, gender, or their position as disabled people. This exclusion leads to the inability of these marginalized groups to access

quality healthcare, an adequate education, or a job, and that often results in low self-esteem, anxiety, or in some circumstances, suicide. The term “*marginal*” was first introduced by the sociologist Robert Park in his book *Human migration and the marginal man* (1928) in order to define the person who is influenced by two differing ethnic or racial groups. In this context, Park (1928) says:

Ordinarily the marginal man is a mixed blood like the Mulatto in the United States or the Eurasian in Asia, but that is apparently because the man of mixed blood is one who lives in two worlds, in both of which he is more or less of a strange. (p. 893)

In other words, since the marginal man typically has mixed ancestry means that he does not belong to a specific group or community. As a result, this mainly leads to his marginalisation and that he will always remain a stranger.

In the late twentieth century, society began to pay more attention to disabilities and their effects on individuals and society. As the population increases, people begin to realize that having children with disabilities is not just a cause for sadness or pity. More information is uncovered about conditions such as autism, Down syndrome, and other impairments. In both novels, the disability concern is portrayed through the main characters August and Ben who come from different backgrounds; however, they both struggle from isolation and alienation due to their disability. Lessing and Palacio have written about them to voice their concern to the world and to help them integrate into society. Palacio for instance, affirms in an interview that she has wondered what it is like to “*have to face a world every day that doesn’t know how to face you back*” which demonstrates the harshness of the world and its notion concerning disabled people.

It is also remarkable in both novels how the different experiences of the characters despite the incomparability in their situations, have similar themes and aspects such as resilience, segregation, as well as the importance of family and friendship in their lives. Ben and August struggle with loneliness and isolation while coping with their disability, which is argued by Siebers (2008), who claims that, on the one hand, a focus on pain runs the risk of portraying

disability as being solely tied to the physical body and unrelated to social constraints, implying that disability is always and only about physical limitation. On the other hand, those with disabilities frequently claim that the social construction argument minimizes the suffering associated with impairment and implies that it can be remedied by altering cultural perceptions (p. 202). Fortunately for the protagonists, they both receive support from different sources while they develop their personalities and grow stronger.

To begin with, I should start by introducing the symptoms of the two forms of disability that the main characters experience in order to understand the way it affects their surroundings. Ben's mental abnormality starts when he is a foetus in his mother's womb. The baby showed very aggressive movements inside it since his first months; he prevented his mother Harriet from sleeping or having some rest. Harriet during this period tried her best to keep herself busy, as shown in the following scene:

She would clean the kitchen, the living-room, the stairs, wash windows, scrub cupboards, her whole body energetically denying the pain. She insisted that her mother and Alice let her work, and when they said there was no need to scrub the kitchen again, she said, 'For the kitchen no, for me yes'. (p. 51)

From the preceding passage, we can see how hyperactive and strange Ben's behaviours are even before his birth. Thus, he pushes his mother to make herself busy just to forget about him and the pain he causes.

What can capture the attention in Ben's childhood are his behaviours and manners. The absence of crying at his birth is one of the most apparent abnormal behaviours and an indication of disability. In addition, he never shows any intimacy with his mother but '*a real littlewrestler*' (p. 60) as Dr. Brett says. Unlike any ordinary baby, at his birth, he kicks his four-year-old sister Jane who tries with innocence to welcome him. He also never gets enough breastfeeding which exhausts his mother, as Lessing describes how "*Ben roared with rage, fastened like a leech to the other nipple, and sucked so hard she felt that her whole breast was disappearing down his throat.*" (p. 63) He never sleeps quietly, and never shows any affection to anyone but only

wrestles and roars of manifest. All the previous signs serve as alarming symptoms of a malfunctioning system in his body, which lead ultimately to the beginning of the recognition of his disability.

Taking into account the period when *The fifth child* is written, which is a time when disability is not something that everyone is familiar with, the Lovatts family could not accept Ben's manners and his way of thinking. This negative reception will not set the appropriate background for Ben to integrate himself into his environment and to accept his disability; yet, it will worsen the situation. He is such a tough boy to the extent that his parents are obliged to keep him in his cot all day and night as a prisoner in order to not disturb the family. Harriet keeps trying her best to create lovely moments with him, but he is nothing unless “*an angry, hostile little troll*” (p. 69), he is extremely resistant and has never given in to a loving moment with his mother or anyone else. Unfortunately, his actions and manners are the main reasons that lead to his marginalisation by his family and society; thus, subjecting him to a dual form of marginalisation.

On the other hand, in Palacio's *Wonder*, the birth of the protagonist August is also remarkable and different from that of others. August's facial deformity becomes a defining characteristic that shapes his perception of himself as someone who doesn't fit the mold of a "normal" child for the reason that “*ordinary kids don't make other ordinary kids run away screaming in playgrounds. I know ordinary kids don't get stared at wherever they go.*” (p. 3) Therefore, for him, the only things that make him ordinary are the typical actions that anyone can do, like eating ice cream, riding a bike, or playing with the ball (p. 3). However, his physical disability has prevented him from attending a conventional school like his peers, leading his devoted mother Isabel to home-school him for four years, pouring all her time and effort into his education. It is only when August reaches the fifth grade that a pivotal decision is made, determining his enrolment in Beecher Preparatory School.

According to the previous discussion, we can see how Ben and August's births are distinct from the other children. However, because of the changes they cause to their families, this variation is not in their favour. Lessing and Palacio present simultaneously how both the protagonists suffer from a disability, and thus, they become marginalized by society and seen as strangers or others because of their condition. Siebers (2008) points out that, although it occurs frequently nowadays, using a person's disability to denigrate them has no place in a society that is supposed to be civilised and developed (p. 4). In other words, the social stereotypes that condemn disabled people in judgmental societies exist in both periods in the time when the novels are written. As a result, even in the most developed countries, disabled people are always seen as weak and useless people.

For people, disability is seen as an issue that prevents a person from doing certain activities in their lives, whether physical as sports or mental as thinking rationally. This way of thinking and seeing disabled people makes society visualize it as a negative issue. Nonetheless, Siebers (2008) disagrees with this idea as he claims: “*on one level, it is easy to believe that disability is only negative if one has insufficient schooling in disability studies, whereas on another level from a disability perspective, it is difficult to see disability as anything but positive*” (p. 5). In other words, it is totally logical for people who do not have sufficient knowledge about disability studies to believe that disability is a negative thing, but once one sees it from a disability perspective, it turns out to have some positivity. We can illustrate from the Olympics games which show to the world that despite one's disability, performance and success are possible.

As reported by Siebers (2008), “*Disability marks the last frontier of unquestioned inferiority because the preference for able-bodiedness makes it extremely difficult to embrace disabled people and to recognize their unnecessary and violent exclusion from society*” (p. 6). The quote further emphasizes the difficulty in embracing disabled individuals and

acknowledging their exclusion from society. The preference for able-bodiedness creates barriers that hinder the recognition of disabled people as equal members of society. This exclusion is characterized as unnecessary and violent, highlighting the harmful consequences of marginalization and the urgent need for society to confront and address this issue. That signifies mainly the reason why August and Ben are treated like aliens and not as humans, they are also considered useless and inferiors in society where they are prevented from their right of a proper place like others. The feeling of inadequacy and lack of qualities and abilities necessary to do something or to cope with life, in general, push the protagonists to emerge as outcasts, shunned and mistreated by their peers and adults in the community, which shows how widespread prejudices against people with disabilities are, even in modern-day society.

Subsequently, social skills are something that people learn throughout their lives, and they use them as they grow and make friends in school by being exposed to more social situations. Unfortunately, because it is part of communication, it does not really work well for people with disability. In addition, communication plays a pivotal role in social interactions, yet individuals with disabilities often face challenges in effectively communicating and expressing themselves. For instance, both Ben and August, as depicted in their respective stories, struggle with engaging in small talk and fitting into society due to their disabilities, which may go unrecognized or misunderstood by the broader community. As a result, a lack of communication does not create opportunities for becoming a social and acceptable person, and the limited ability to communicate can create barriers to becoming a socially accepted and integrated individual.

On one side, because of disability, Ben experiences delays at a very young age and that prevents him from keeping up with his age-level peers. However, parents on the other side may experience denial when their children have developmental delays, and it is challenging for them to raise children with disabilities, for instance, as one can notice in the following scene between

Harriet and her husband “ *'He's a little child,' she said, 'He's our child.' 'No, he's not,' said David, finally. 'Well, he certainly isn't mine'* ” (p. 90), David is unable to accept his son's disability, thereby denying his son's belonging to him. They also go through more stress and worse well-being than parents who do not have disabled children, like the stress that occurs to August's mother in *Wonder* whenever it comes to her son's well-being “*you have to promise me you won't forget to put on the bug spray [...] And put on your sunscreen [...] do not forget to take your hearing aids off if you go swimming*” (p. 254). Therefore, the child's sleep and behaviour difficulties, the family's material resources, the parents' employment position, social support, unmet service needs, and the parents' coping mechanisms are all factors that influence stress levels.

In relation to disability, Siebers (2008) declares that minority identity is one of the consequences that occur to disabled people:

while seen historically as a matter for medical intervention, disability has been described more recently in disability studies as a minority identity that must be addressed not as personal misfortune or individual defect but as the product of a disabling social and built environment. (p. 03)

In other words, because disabled people are perceived as a burden on society, they are regarded as a rejected minority identity. Furthermore, the social model that shows the limits of these societies is depicted through Ben and August, who are considered minority identities, to demonstrate how society can contribute to aggravate the effects of disability. As a consequence of the protagonist's disability, they end up marginalized and unwanted by family and society. In *The fifth child*, one can notice that after Harriet gives birth to Ben, the family members are separated because of him. For instance, David is as never the same as before, the couple used to share love and joy, “*tears and misery had not ever been on their agenda*” (p. 45) and they lived with happiness, but during the fifth pregnancy, his behaviour towards Harriet changes in an unexpected way, “*she felt rejected by him*” (p. 45) as well as not giving much attention to her emotional needs.

Meanwhile, and in relation to Palacio's *Wonder*, it is clear that at the beginning of the school year, August's attendance at Beecher Preparatory creates issues for many students. He faces extreme prejudice and bullying because of his disability, as well as the fact of being isolated and treated poorly by most of his classmates. August notices

As the desks started to fill up, I did notice that no one sat down next to me. A couple of times someone was about to sit next to me, then changed his or her mind at the last minute and sat somewhere else" (p. 37)

It is evident then that everyone is avoiding him by purpose. The bullies, however, go far from avoiding him to nicknaming him for his physical appearance according to some movies' fictional characters such as Darth Sidious in *Star Wars*, Gollum in *The Lord of The Rings*, and Freddy Krueger in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. In fact, all these nicknames represent ugly characters with faces that look like melted ones which shows that popular cultures reinforce these stereotypes instead of fighting them, and those bullies are influenced by these movies. Consequently, as minority identity asserts, he spends most of his time alone, hiding in the shadows and avoiding school in order to prevent these bullies.

According to Siebers (2008), disability studies do not cure the disability itself; rather, it investigates the stigmas associated with it. He affirms that:

Disability studies does not treat disease or disability, hoping to cure or avoid them; it studies the social meanings, symbols, and stigmas attached to disability identity and asks how they relate to enforced systems of exclusion and oppression, attacking the widespread belief that having an able body and mind determines whether one is a quality human being". (p. 04)

In other words, it studies the relationship between disability, exclusion and oppression challenging the belief that able-bodiedness is what determines the human being. In that context, it is assumed in *The fifth child* that Ben is the one to have killed a dog and a cat, which has served as a warning sign to everyone to stay away from him. This stigma pushes the entire family to become afraid of him more and more because if there is an ability to kill a dog, then killing a child is close to possible. Thus, it means, as Dorothy says, that "*people are going to think twice about coming again*" (p. 76) to the family occasions or to put their children to play

with Ben. This leads to the exclusion of Ben from the family to be considered as a threat to society. In fact, Ben's existence makes every day look like a long nightmare for everyone. The charm of the occasions and family gatherings is never the same as it was before, because now, almost everyone is making excuses to not come, which makes Harriet more upset and worried about her and her husband's dream of creating the big family they always dreamed of.

However, to get rid of the burden of excluding Ben from the family, they finally agree that they have to put him in an institution, that can -as they claim- take care of his health condition as Ben's grandmother Dorothy suggests "*Ben has got to go into an institution.*" *'But he's normal,' said Harriet, grim. 'The doctor says he is.' 'He may be normal for what he is. But he is not normal for what we are.'*" (p. 79) Unfortunately, despite that David knows what is going on in the institution, he agrees to give his son to them to get rid of him, and this demonstrates the unacceptance and rejection he has for his child. The fact that he cannot handle this immense responsibility is the reason that pushes him to accept this decision. In other words, maternal love is beyond everything, as one can see, even though Ben is such a burden on Harriet, she is the last one to agree with this decision because of the maternal attachment and love; and since she is his mother, she is the only one who accepts Ben for who he truly is.

As a matter of fact, we can see clearly the change that happened in the Lovatts family when Ben is finally gone. The family thrives in a good environment without him, and Harriet finally understands how much of a burden Ben has been, how he has mistreated them, and how much the children have endured. Lessing describes the family after Ben's departure:

But now Ben was gone their eyes shone, they were full of high spirits, and they kept coming to Harriet with little gifts of a sweet or a toy, 'This is for you, Mummy.' Or they rushed up to kiss her, or stroke her face, or nuzzle to her like happy calves or foals. And David took days off from work to be with them all - to be with her. (p. 93)

The happiness however does not last long, because even though Harriet is not the one who sends Ben away, as a mother, she feels guilty for letting him go. She cannot forget her son's cries when he was taken away, "*It was not with love, or even affection, that she thought of him, and*

she disliked herself for not being able to find one little spark of normal feeling: it was guilt and horror that kept her awake through the nights” (p. 94). She dares to face and challenge the whole family in the name of maternal love and decides to retrieve him back home sacrificing her family’s happiness and hers too. This explains how motherhood can beat hatred in a place where everyone thinks only about themselves. As a result, the Lovatts' happiness is linked to Ben's disability, because Ben's return makes the family's happiness fade, and that consequence is attached to them for the rest of their lives.

Under such circumstances, everyone gives up on both Harriet and her son, the family breaks up again, and she becomes the only one responsible for him. Whenever Ben glances at David, he backs away terrified of him. He believes that his father betrays him, and he could never trust him ever again, still, *“David did not try to reassure him; as far as he was concerned, Ben was Harriet's responsibility, and his was for the children - the real children”* (p. 109). Subsequently, this creates an issue for Ben where he could not recognize who is the friend and who is the enemy. The parent strongly follows his rejection in the previous scene, and that his son’s condition does not matter as the society stereotypes do. The parental rejection experienced by Ben in the preceding scene further amplifies his sense of isolation. His father's dismissal of his condition and the societal stereotypes attached to disability reinforce the notion that Ben's worth and identity are diminished in the eyes of others. This societal rejection becomes internalized, exacerbating Ben's struggle to navigate social interactions and find acceptance.

In relation to the oppression of disabled people, Lennard (2006) emphasizes that:

For centuries people with disabilities have been an oppressed and repressed group. People with disabilities have been isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalized, and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group. (p. xv)

As shown in the above passage, Society has historically viewed people with disabilities as a group that needs to be instructed, regulated, and controlled. This paternalistic approach has resulted in their limited agency and denied them the opportunity to fully participate in society.

Institutionalization has been a common practice, with individuals with disabilities being confined to specific facilities where their lives and actions were heavily monitored and controlled. This can be related to Ben's situation with his family since disability was and still one of the strongest main reasons for marginalisation and otherness, eventually, this leads mainly to the minority identity that is referred to by Siebers in his *Disability theory* (2008). The latter has a strong relation to disability and its effects, since disabled people experience relative disadvantages according to the socially dominant group, they become a minority identity that represents weakness and dependence struggling with oppression and marginalisation in their daily life.

In *Wonder*, the protagonist August experiences marginalization due to his physical disability, which significantly impacts his ability to have a normal childhood. As August navigates through daily life, he constantly encounters the gaze of others, with people staring and whispering about him. This constant scrutiny creates a deep sense of discomfort within him, making him acutely aware of how he is different from those around him. To cope with the overwhelming attention and to shield himself from the judgmental eyes of others, August develops a unique strategy. He decides to wear an astronaut helmet whenever he goes outside, using it as a protective barrier against the stares and whispers. The helmet, a gift from his sister's friend Miranda, becomes a symbolic tool that allows August to create a temporary refuge from the discomfort of being the subject of constant scrutiny.

August's choice to wear the helmet highlights the profound impact that society's reaction to his physical disability has on his self-esteem and emotional well-being. It underscores the isolating nature of his experiences and the lengths he goes to protect himself from the discomfort caused by others' stares and reactions. Through the story in *Wonder*, the author provides a portrayal of the marginalization experienced by August with his visible disabilities. It illuminates the challenges they face in their interactions with others and the creative strategies

they develop to cope with societal pressures. The helmet symbolizes both August's vulnerability and his resilience, encapsulating the complexities of his journey towards self-acceptance in a world that often fails to embrace differences.

Through time, people started getting used to August's face, but there remained a palpable barrier between him and others. No one would dare to touch him, as the mere thought of physical contact with August would elicit a "panic attack" (p. 71) in them, as if he is carrying a contagious disease. Anyone who chose to sit or befriend August would be abandoned by their peers, facing the harsh consequences of association. However, there is one occasion that brought solace to August, and that is Halloween. In August's eyes, Halloween provides a rare opportunity for his disability to be accepted by his environment. As he expresses, "*I get to go around like every other kid with a mask and nobody thinks I look weird. Nobody takes a second look. Nobody notices me. Nobody knows me*" (p. 73). It is during this time that August experiences a glimpse of happiness, for it is the only period when he can blend in with his peers without the constant worry of being judged by their looks and criticisms. On Halloween, he can walk with his head held high, unburdened by the need to hide.

However, life is never without its challenges, and the presence of bullies persists. The betrayal that August experiences is particularly profound when he overhears his supposed friend, Jack, speaking ill of him behind his back, even going so far as to joke about August contemplating suicide if he were in his place. At that moment, August feels thunderstruck, a profound sense of betrayal gripping his heart. He yearns for a metaphorical black hole that could swallow him whole, wishing to escape the pain inflicted by his closest companion. This instance serves as a painful reminder that, similar to Ben's experiences, August's disability isolates him from others, rendering him dehumanized in their eyes. Despite his resilient spirit, August is confronted with the harsh reality that the journey towards acceptance and understanding is fraught with obstacles, and the prejudices he faces continue to marginalize him in society's eyes.

Furthermore, the difference between the medical model and the social model according to Siebers (2008) is that:

The medical model defines disability as an individual defect lodged in the person, a defect that must be cured or eliminated if the person is to achieve full capacity as a human being...Unlike the medical approach, the emerging field of disability studies defines disability not as an individual defect but as the product of social injustice. (p. 03)

That is to say that the medical model of disability asserts that people are disabled because of their impairments or peculiarities, and it focuses on what is wrong with the person rather than what he needs. The medical paradigm of disability enhances low expectations and causes people to lose independence, choice, and control over their life, while the social model puts us in identifying barriers that make living more difficult for people with disabilities. By removing these barriers, people with disabilities gain independence, choice, and power. For instance, Ben and August's disabilities are seen as a social impairment and not as a medical problem. It is true that society does not accept them at first because of their disability, however, in the end, everyone finds a place where he belongs when people started to see their inner beauty.

Disabled people who do not have any relationships with other people with disabilities in their communities are assigned the social role of a terrible, difficult existence. In this context, Lennard (2006) comes to the conclusion that:

the stereotyped notions of the "tragedy" and "suffering" of "the disabled" result from the isolation of disabled people in society. Disabled people with no connections to others with disabilities in their communities are, indeed, afflicted with the social role assignment of a tragic, burdensome existence. (p. 107)

When disabled people are socially isolated and do not have opportunities to connect with others facing similar challenges, their existence is often assigned a predetermined social role of being tragic and burdensome. This is because society's understanding of disability is often shaped by limited exposure and lack of personal connections with disabled individuals. Without the presence of supportive networks and community connections, disabled individuals may face a lack of understanding, empathy, and inclusion. For instance, Palacio and Lessing show that it

is very important to be kind to others, and how behaviours can tip the scales. We also understand through August and Ben the way a disabled person can be a burden on others because of the framed notions made by the abled society while portraying them as pitiable and pathetic.

In addition, Siebers (2008) emphasizes that “*the presence of disability creates a different picture of identity*” (p. 5), which means, in a society that does not accept disabled people, August and Ben create a minority group. They are identified as another identity of the human being, or more specifically as the other. Throughout history, almost all cultures have come to define disability as a social burden and people with disabilities were and still are seen as strangers. When we take into consideration the social awareness about disability rights, we can notice that disabled people have not been able to have control over the discrimination inflicted upon them due to the way society uses the idea of disability as a metaphor signifying human impairment and weakness.

In relation to the way society sees disabled people, Daisy, the dog, is the only creature who does not perceive August as a burden due to the fact that she cannot be influenced by the stereotypes of society’s social model. Rather than being influenced by the prejudices of society, Daisy constantly approaches to play and sleep with August. In contrast to how he is regarded by people, this creature loves August for who he is and not for how he looks like. Their relationship is based solely on love. In addition, we may also observe the difference in Jack and Summer's communication styles with August. Summer has not hesitated to sit with him in one table at lunchtime without considering others' opinions, or being asked to by the teachers. In fact, she enjoys his company and more specifically, his personality; she hangs out with him because of his kindness. Whereas, Jack refuses to take August on a school tour simply because he is deformed, without even bothering himself to get to know him or to discover his personality and his inner beauty. Eventually, to put it all together, Daisy’s unconditional love for August is proof that disability is a constructed notion by society.

In addition, as confirmed by Siebers (2008), “*able bodiedness is a temporary identity at best, while being a human guarantees that all other identities will eventually come into contact with some form of disability identity*” (p. 5). This highlights the fact that disabled people should be treated equally. Still, August is constantly reminded at school and outside that he is not a normal child and cannot be treated like other children. For instance, at the Fifth Grade Nature Retreat, he is bullied by a group of older pupils. It is then when he has remembered what he looks like and how it feels for others when they first see his face. They have attacked him in the middle of the pitch-black forest and he is pushed backwards and landed on his back, which ultimately results in the loss of his hearing aids. When August and Jack are unable to get rid of the bullies, several of the other school students have come to assist them. As humans, everyone can experience being disabled at any moment, which does not give us the right to bully or mistreat others.

Furthermore, disabled people have the tendency to focus on their own condition without taking into consideration other people’s feelings. As Siebers (2008) suggests that the “*loss of ability translates into loss of sociability. People with disabilities are bitter, angry, self-pitying, or selfish. Because they cannot see beyond their own pain, they lose the ability to consider the feelings of other people*” (p. 10). This statement suggests that the loss of ability may result in frustration, resentment, or a sense of injustice, leading some individuals with disabilities to become emotionally preoccupied with their own challenges. As a result, they may struggle to empathize or understand the experiences and emotions of others. This idea is illustrated in the following passage:

That’s just life, Auggie. You want to be treated normally, right? This is normal! We all have to go to school sometimes despite the fact that we have bad days, okay?” “Do people go out of their way to avoid touching you, Via?” he answered, which left me momentarily without an answer. “Yeah, right. That’s what I thought. So don’t compare your bad days at school to mine, okay?” “Okay, that’s fair,” I said. “But it’s not a contest about whose day suck the most, Auggie. The point is we all have to put up with the bad days. Now, unless you want to be treated like a baby the rest of your life, or like a kid with special needs, you just have to suck it up and go.” (p. 115)

According to the preceding quotation, despite August's impairment, he should accept his bad days if he wants to be treated equally to other people. Thus, even ordinary individuals are occasionally marginalized despite their physical and mental abilities.

In *The Fifth Child*, Doris Lessing depicts how Ben, despite facing rejection from both his family and society, finds solace and companionship through his connection with John, the male babysitter. This bond and the opportunity to hang out with John and his friends offers Ben a glimpse of belonging, a space where he can shed the weight of societal expectations and experience genuine acceptance. For Ben, it provides an opportunity to learn social skills, make friends, and experience acceptance and recognition. On the other hand, his family, particularly his mother, benefits from his absence as it allows her to focus on her other children and attend to their needs. This relationship serves as a respite for both Ben and his family, offering moments of joy and relief amidst the challenges they face.

Both authors focus on the way that children with disabilities are treated by their families and by society at large, and how that treatment affects the children and the people around them. In both novels, it is strongly emphasized how important friendship and acceptance are to the life of a disabled person. The main protagonists in both novels have been excluded from society, but with the help of their families and other community members, they are able to overcome these obstacles. In *Wonder*, August is ostracized because of his physical appearance, but he is welcomed into the community after he gains confidence and shows his intelligence and independence. Likewise, Ben is treated with compassion by John after being subjected to harsh treatment at home. He is often treated in a way that has made him feel like he is not worth the effort and does not deserve the same privileges as his other siblings.

Furthermore, after finally starting school, Harriet gets worried more and more about Ben and his educational level as well as his behaviour with his mates, still, to please John, Ben does well in trying hard with his studies as his teacher confirms "*He's a good little chap. He tries so*

hard" (p. 120). However, at the end of the term, Ben's teacher complains that he is a challenging boy and does not accept being touched. Despite how different Ben is compared to the kids his age, no one but Harriet could accept his difference and his reality of not being normal, because confessing this difference puts them in problems. In other words, while able-bodied are seen as normal people, disabled people like Ben are struggling because they are considered weird and dangerous people.

After John's departure, Ben joins the secondary school, and as a sign of maturity he forms a group of friends in which he becomes their leader. They hang out together, come to Ben's house to watch television, talk and serve themselves food. Even though his friends are older than him, nonetheless, it nearly seems as though he controls them. They have their own style of talking, they are loud and raucous, unlike Ben who barely speaks. Now while Ben has his own group with whom he spends most of his time, he does not bother his family anymore, it is as if he has found his minority identity group where he can be himself with no judgments or verdicts. In essence, Doris Lessing highlights the significance of finding one's tribe, even in unconventional ways. Ben's formation of this group demonstrates the innate human need for connection and understanding. Within this close-knit circle, Ben not only finds acceptance but also establishes a sense of control and autonomy.

In fact, it is important to recognize that while violent behaviour may be observed in some autistic children, it is not a defining characteristic of autism as a whole. However, it is noteworthy that aggression can serve as a signal of underlying distress, particularly related to communication and social challenges experienced by individuals with autism. Doris Lessing's novel, *The fifth child*, provides a thought-provoking example of this dynamic, as one can see, most of the programmes Ben and his friends used to watch are aggressive, and their feelings become full of pleasure when a victim would be tortured or when blood flows from bullets. In the context of violent behaviours, August's way to express his inner feelings of anger is by

answering his mother and sister impolitely:

“So how was school?” I said, scooching Daisy over so I could sit on his bed next to him. “Fine,” he answered, still not looking up from his game. “Auggie, I’m talking to you!” I pulled the PlayStation out of his hands. “Hey!” he said angrily. “How was school?” “I said fine! He yelled back, grabbing the PlayStation back from me. (p. 96)

It was his way of showing his rage and hidden emotions. Thus, both Ben and August find their way in expressing themselves.

In *Wonder*, Palacio did not make it simple for August to overcome the bullies and the oppressors at his school, but thanks to his kindness and generosity, he finds a favourable environment in order to surpass them and to be accepted from the people around him. Indeed, August's family is the key factor in his survival; his parents are extremely proud of him, and his sister is always by his side to lend support. The neighbourhood where they live is peaceful and full of nice people, for instance, “*the waitresses at the coffee shop who all call me “honey” and give me lollipops whenever they see me*” (p. 36). In addition, instead of making August feel different from other pupils at school, the teachers are friendly to him and they do their best to help August feel at ease during the lessons.

As we have seen before, in *The fifth child* and *Wonder*, that both protagonists are supported by their mothers. Ben is supported mostly by Harriet who chooses him over her husband and children. As well as being the reason for his survival from the institution. For August, the person who supported him the most and had the greatest faith in his abilities is his mother. She is the one who cares about him the most; she is constantly concerned for him. She stays up late at night to ensure his safety and sanity, and every morning she would carefully prepare food for him so that it would be easy for him to eat. Isabel is scared most of the time for August, she is the one who spent days and nights creating all his Halloween costumes and making sure he is well prepared for the school picnic and ready to show up if any bad thing happens to him. After having a child with a physical disability, the parents eventually take on a greater role as carers, giving the child most of the attention in an effort to make up for his

deficiencies.

On the other side, Due to the father's intense concern for August, their relationship is more like a friendship than a father-son relationship. Whenever the father becomes concerned about his son, he will make sure to see him and talk to him. He never forces him to do anything he does not want to do, as well as being always by his side. Indeed, the astronaut helmet is thrown away by the father, but it is for the best as he misses his face and adores seeing it, and the fact that he is constantly covering it up kind of crushes his heart, he says addressing his son August:

You were wearing that helmet all the time. And the real, real, real, real truth is: I missed seeing your face, Auggie. I know you don't always love it, but you have to understand ... I love it. I love this face of yours, Auggie, completely and passionately. And it kind of broke my heart that you were always covering it up." demonstrating how much the father loves his son and accepts him just the way he is. (p. 291)

As it is seen in the above passage, the father is such a great support for his son. Besides the parents' support, his sister's existence matters in August's path through self-acceptance, and because she is the older sister, she takes on greater responsibility for her brother. She learns how to not complain and to do things on her own to not disturb her parents who give all their time to take care of August. However, they trust each other and they manage to take care of each other in order to create the needed harmony in the family.

Being surrounded by good friends teaches the person more about himself and pushes him to extract the best version of himself. In other words, August's friends encourage him to keep going when times get tough and also celebrate his successes with him. Miranda for instance, Via's best friend, has always considered August as her brother. She has convinced the theatre director to change the play because its protagonist is terribly deformed and she does not want to hurt August's feelings nor shatter his self-esteem and confidence. In addition, Summer is the ideal illustration of how to be such a nice friend to August; she admires him more for his actions than for his appearance. She asserts that:

Some kids have actually come out and asked me why I hang out with “the freak” so much. These are kids that don’t even know him well. If they knew him, they wouldn’t call him that. “Because he’s a nice kid!” I always answer. (p. 119)

She is brave enough to never worry about what people might think of her, and the most important thing is that she becomes friends with him by her own choice. She also defends him in both his presence and absence, and thanks to her, a reunite becomes possible between August and his best friend Jack, and that portrays the core of the friendship. The school also has made changes through the year, for instance, the Art Show which is supposed to be a painting of self-portraits, but turns out to become a self-portrait of an animal. In conclusion, the power of family and genuine friendship is evident in the positive impact it has on individuals' lives. August's family and friends play a crucial role in shaping his self-perception and bringing out the best in him. Their unwavering support, encouragement, and acceptance teach August valuable lessons about resilience and self-worth.

From the above analysis, it is seen that the two selected novels show how attitudes towards people with disabilities change over the years, but it is still important to consider how people of different generations see disability. Still, and as it is shown through the discussion, the protagonists' sense of inadequacy and the belief that they lack the qualities and abilities required to do something or cope with life in general drives them to emerge as weak people who lack the ability to function as effectively in the community. Even though both characters struggle with loneliness and isolation while coping with their conditions, they eventually become advocates for social change. They come out victorious because of the strength of their character and perseverance in the face of adversity, as well as the fact that they both receive support and encouragement from different sources as they develop resilience and grow stronger.

To conclude, both characters eventually manage to break free of the negative attitudes and prejudices that surround them and live their life free from judgment and hatred. This realization helps them to cope with their disabilities as they come to realize that each one of them is a valued member of society in their own way, and they have much to offer to their

communities. They also discover that they can be successful despite their differences and this gives them the courage to fight in order to be treated with respect and dignity. In *Wonder*, August is ostracized because of his physical appearance, but he is welcomed into the community after he gains confidence and shows his intelligence and independence. In *The fifth child*, Ben discovers that he is not alone; there are many other people who share the same struggles as him, and because of this, he is able to embrace his uniqueness and become an accepted member of society.

Chapter two: Marginalisation and the Relationship of Disabled Children with Parents and Siblings

The following chapter is meant to explore the relationship between disabled children with their siblings as it is portrayed in Lessing's *The fifth child* (1988) and Palacio's *Wonder* (2012). The main focus will be put on the way parents in given and specific families treat their non-disabled children in front of their disabled brothers. In order to better and fully grasp and understand this relationship, I intend to make use of Peter Burke's *Brothers and sisters of disabled children* (2004) theory. It has to be noted that in many cases, many families with disabled children frequently have to face the fact that their children will not be treated the same since they are not under the same circumstances. However, even though parents know how much sibling relations are necessary for the harmony and unity of any household, they cannot manage to treat them equally.

Family at its best serves a variety of vital functions for its members. It provides emotional and psychological security, particularly through the warmth, love, and companionship that starts with parents and therefore passes down to children. Parents are sources of security as they are responsible for providing some additional social duties such as child raising and socialization, as well as humanitarian activities such as caring for their members who are sick or disabled. When a new-born baby arrives to the family, the attitude of the older children changes, as Burke (2004) states:

The birth of any baby will have an impact on the lives of all the family, which includes siblings [...] At the very least, a new baby is an extra focus of interest for all family members, but a new baby in the family is also a source of potential stress, because the family is experiencing the effects of a major change to its constitution. (p.42)

From the above quote, we notice that the stable general atmosphere that generates the living conditions before the arrival of the new-born baby shifts to an atmosphere of tension and extreme stress mainly for parents as well as their children. Therefore, in such given circumstances,

parents should do their best to treat each of their children equally and try to satisfy their children needs.

In order to epitomize what I have already mentioned, as far as the two novels are concerned, I find that Lessing and Palacio focus on the idea of the change that occurs within a family when a new child is born with a disability or without. In the two cases, there will be a change within the family and the relationships among its members particularly when there are already older siblings. In other words, a difference will inevitably settle inside the family whether the new-born child is disabled or not, since the new baby is going to have all the attention and care. However, the more disability is severe the more attention is afforded. Such a situation engenders a decrease in the attention given to the other siblings causing, as Burke (2004) points out, an “*emotional stress through demands placed on carers*” (p. 44). As a result, some siblings become associated with their siblings' disabilities because they live with them; thus, they become accustomed to it and manage to live with it, whereas others may suffer negatively as a result of this relationship. Despite the fact that parents find difficulties in decisions making when raising their children, especially when they have a disabled child, they may, in some ways give the disabled child more attention than to the healthy ones. In fact, children need to be respected and cared for just like every other member of the family. However, siblings of a disabled child may resent this neglect and become troubled by the parent for neglecting their needs in favour of their sibling's.

At the beginning of *The fifth child* and *Wonder*, we can notice the families' happiness and harmony before the birth of the disabled children. On the one hand, Lessing portrays the Lovatts as a perfect family since parents used to welcome each new-born child with their own way; “*they all drank champagne, and poured some on little Luke's head*” (p. 24), and Harriet's first four children were easy ones and lovely. Even though the children came in succession, which did not prevent the family from gathering at the table of the Lovatts' house on each occasion to

see and play with the children and to celebrate. These depictions of happiness and harmony serve as a stark contrast to the challenges that arise following the birth of the disabled children.

On the other hand, in Palacio's *Wonder*, we are told that the Pullmans family also used to live in harmony and joy while Olivia, the older sister of August is the only beloved child of the family, as the following quote indicates:

Everyone's looking at me and I'm looking at the cake. You can see in that picture how I really was the first child, first grandchild, first niece. I don't remember what it felt like, of course, but I can see it plain as can be in the pictures. (p. 84)

However, when a family consists of a child who has a mental or physical disability and requires daily care and supervision, the parents become overly preoccupied with looking after the disabled child and make him a priority; thus it leads to the neglect of the other children. In other words, having a disabled child among a family makes raising them together a difficult task that will have an impact on the entire members. On one side, children who have a sibling with a disability have unique needs and challenges that require special attention from their families; however, having a disabled child does not necessarily require abandoning the needs of the other children but giving them at least the same attention. On the other side, as parents, they are certainly aware of how stressful and demanding life can be when they are forced to adjust their entire way of life due to their impaired child's demands and preferences. Sometimes it can be difficult to balance the needs of their well-being children with those of their disabled children since the parents play a pivotal role in such situations.

The impact of the disabled child on siblings and parents is seen clearly in both *The fifth child* and *Wonder*. For instance, Lessing puts an end to the Lovatts' happiness and unison by bringing Ben among them as a disabled son and sibling. The parents used to feel the fresh beginning of a new life whenever they had a new baby, but not at that time when Ben came because they felt that they are condemned by his existence. In this regard, Lessing says: "*They were a family still! Happiness... they could hardly believe, any of them, that Ben could have*

taken so much away from them” (p. 78). In other words, rather than expanding their happiness, his presence seems to diminish it. Ben's challenging behaviour and severe developmental issues create a strain within the family. The once harmonious and joyful gatherings become filled with tension and unease as they struggle to cope with the demands of raising a child who does not conform to societal expectations.

Ben's disability affects began to manifest when Harriet is heavily criticized by her family for having Ben, as they accused and put the blame on her for his birth. She is never supported or helped by anyone; even her husband, David, who does not show any affection for his wife who is the only one who takes care of Ben. In this sense, Burke in his theory (2004) argues that: *“The impact of diagnosis of disability is often a shock to parents and they are likely to experience a mixture of emotions, ranging from the delight of having a new-born child to anger, denial and grief (Frude 1991; Knight, 1996; Russell 1997)”* (p. 43) and that is what David is experiencing. Yet, Harriet never denied Ben's existence; on the contrary, she cares about him and accepted him.

In the same way as Lessing's novel, Palacio presents August as the centre of his family, his sister Olivia affirms that *“August is the Sun. Me and Mom and Dad are planets orbiting the Sun. The rest of our family and friends are asteroids and comets floating around the planets orbiting the Sun”* (p. 82). After August's birth, the attention that was given to Olivia is mostly transferred to him because of his special needs. She believes that he was the one who needed it more than she did. However, as a result of this lack of attention, she faces a variety of problems in both her personal and social life. Hence, it is important for parents to remember that when the needs of one child may be different from that of another, all children deserve to be treated with love and respect and have the same opportunities for growth and development.

Parents' life can be extremely chaotic; therefore, it is often challenging to manage their time to take care of their disabled child in addition to the other children and all of their other

responsibilities. Burke (2004) asserts that parents “*found it difficult to do things together and had ‘less time for brothers and sisters’ owing to the needs of their disabled child; consequently, siblings experience some loss of attention*” (p. 52). In other words, despite parents’ best intention, some of them may inadvertently isolate their healthy children because of the extra care that is given to the disabled child. One situation in which this occurs is when a parent becomes preoccupied in taking care of his or her child with special needs to the point that he forgets to consider the needs of his or her other children who may feel neglected at the end. This is known as marginalisation and can have very negative consequences for a child’s psychological growth and well-being.

In relation to Lessing’s and Palacio’s narratives, we notice that the parents become overwhelmed by the demands of caring for their child with special needs. As reported in *The fifth child*, Harriet confesses that:

After a day with Ben I feel as if nothing exists but him. As if nothing has ever existed. I suddenly realize I haven’t remembered the others for hours. I forgot their supper yesterday[...] I came down and found Helen cooking their supper. (p. 80)

As a result, instead of looking over her other children, it appeared to her that she had spent her entire life attempting to comprehend what Ben is feeling and thinking (p. 81). Besides, Ben’s father was engrossed in work in order to afford the house rent. Similarly in *Wonder*, August’s mother Isabel has granted most of her time to her son. She would prepare August’s lunch every day in a perfect way, “*American cheese on whole-wheat bread, soft enough for Auggie to eat*” (p. 100) and she would cut the grapes in half so he would not choke on them. However, she never gave such care to Olivia who feels neglected by her mother who seems more interested in tending to the needs of the disabled child than in spending time with her or in showing affection towards her. In other words, while trying to satisfy Ben’s and August’s basic needs, the two mothers lose the other non-disabled children’s confidence.

Consequently, siblings of disabled children often experience a wide range of emotions

because they do not get the same attention as their disabled siblings do. Some children who grow up with them often face many challenges in their interactions with other people. This may lead to facing social difficulties, and unfortunately, children are frequently the targets of ridicule and bullying. Furthermore, conforming to what Burke (2004) states, “*brothers and sisters of disabled children experience a secondary form of disability – as Glendinning (1986) expressed it, siblings ‘may experience the disadvantages as well’*” (p. 44). In other words, when a child has disabilities, his siblings are likely to be affected in some way or another, and as a result, they will have to learn to live with their disabled brother or sister. In this case, one can clearly see the impact of the disabled child on his siblings in both novels. Ben in *The fifth child*, for instance, has a great influence on the family; he could break the affection between his parents, and ultimately separate all his siblings from their mother. With time, the family that was once united falls apart; Luke and Helen go to boarding schools, Paul joins the school, and Jane remains “*solid, sensible, quiet, and as able to save herself as Luke and Helen*” (p. 119), then she is ultimately taken by her grandmother Dorothy to live with her away from Ben.

In fact, even though all the siblings are marginalized because of Ben, Paul is the most harmed one. He “*was even more difficult than Ben. But he was a normal ‘disturbed’ child, not an alien*” (p. 129) and because of the short time between the birth of Paul and Ben, Harriet never gets enough of Paul, she craves for him. The fact is that he “*was always on somebody's lap, and his laugh was heard everywhere: this was his real nature*” (p. 68) however, he is “*overshadowed by Ben and his demands*” (p. 68) as a result of his mother's lack of attention. Despite that Paul used to be the most fascinated child by Ben, after witnessing his violent behaviours, he subsequently would “*burst into tears, or bang his head on the wall with frustration*” (p. 119) whenever Ben is brought back home. The horrors Ben gives to Paul prevents him from having a normal childhood as well as calling for feelings of exclusion.

In *Wonder*, Palacio demonstrates the shift that happens in Olivia's life before and after

August's entering the house. Olivia, as one can see, used to be the only child whom everyone is taking care of, but after the birth of her little brother, she is unintentionally marginalised. She starts to resent this neglect, and the fact that most of the attention and care is now switched to the disabled sibling pushes her to take care of herself on her own. In this context, Burke (2004) explains that "*a child with disabilities will not only be different in various ways, but will certainly require even more attention from those charged with his or her care (Moeller 1986)*" (p. 42). To put it in another way, it is the responsibility of the parents to provide a well-rounded upbringing for all the children, including their disabled siblings. However, in such situation, the parents' focus may be solely on caring for the child with special needs and ignoring the other children in the process.

Additionally, after the shift that happened to Olivia, the only person who listens to her is her grandmother Grans. The latter loves Olivia more than anyone else, even more than August. She gives her the care and love that is seized from her since August "*has many angels looking out for him already*" (p. 87), but for her, Grans confronts: "*I want you to know that you have me looking out for you.*" (p. 87) In fact, Olivia is attached to her grandmother, and the period she has stayed with her is considered the best period in her life, it is the only period when she feels free from the condemnations of others. Her grandmother is like a helmet to her because she protects her from all kinds of external attacks like people's stares "*no one stared at Grans and me when we went to town to buy groceries. No one pointed at us. No one even noticed us*" (p. 85). But after the death of the grandmother, many things have changed. She is now facing the people's stares alone, but the words of her grandmother are covering her like a blanket that protects her and reminds her that she was once special to someone.

As a result, the social responsibility of parents is to ensure that their children who have special needs and need more assistance than their peers do are having enough attention and care, as well as to have a safe and healthy environment in which they can develop themselves as

independent individuals. Still, the parents of a disabled child face many challenges in raising their children and maintaining their family's overall well-being, as it is rarely easy for them to accomplish a balance between the needs of both abled and disabled children. Eventually, they neglect the needs of their other children such as love and care, which consequently promotes the feelings of resentment and jealousy among their children.

Burke (2004) argues that "*the early experience of 'difference' may not be an immediate reality, especially during the initial days when baby comes home and the level of attention from parents or carers will be similar to that of a normally developing baby*" (p. 44) which is the case of both Ben and August's siblings. In other words, when the new-borns are brought home they are welcomed and loved and all children are treated the same. For instance, when Harriet gives birth to Ben at the hospital, Luke and Helen are by her sides saluting him with innocence and love. Months later, his "*cot was put in the room where the older children were, in hope that Ben would be made social, friendly, by his siblings*" (p. 68). This uncovers that in *The fifth child*, parents are trying to put Ben in a social environment to get to know his siblings and to learn the social skills.

In addition, Ben was not given special treatment at the beginning, instead, "*the new baby had of course been offered to everyone to hold*" (p. 68) like any new-born would be treated. As well, when Olivia knows about having a new brother, she starts to practice how to be a good big sister taking care of him. She used a doll to practice on changing its diapers and feeding it. The fact that she has taken care of it for months just to learn the way of how to take care of her brother shows the strong fraternity relation between them. She "*never used to see August the way other people saw him*" (p. 85), she used to see him as a normal child and her relationship with him is strong. Accordingly, even though it is only for a short time, the children cannot sense the difference in the treatment between them and their disabled siblings.

Yet, Burke (2004) explains how the difference in treatment of disabled and non-disabled

children evolves gradually at the sametime with their growth:

The difference is that such attention is unlikely to diminish and may increase when disabilities are severe, and will continue for as long as the child remains at home. The consequences for parents caring for a disabled child are that the additional demands leave less time and opportunity for attention for other children. (p. 44)

The above excerpt shows that children who have a sibling with a physical or mental disability may not experience the difference in treatment at first. However, they may become resentful if they feel that their parents have focused too much attention on caring for their sibling and not enough on their own needs and feelings. They may eventually develop behavioural problems or other problems of their own as they attempt to cope with these feelings of resentment and frustration. This can lead to low self-esteem and depression for the child as well as conflict between the child and their parents as they get older.

As it has been pointed out in *The fifth child*, children changed their attitude toward their mother, “*the way they did these days, were looking at each other, excluding her, in some understanding of their own. They went off, without looking at her*” (p. 81). After sending Ben to the institution, “*Harriet heard the children talking about the Easter holidays. 'It will be all right now that Ben isn't here,' said Helen. They had always understood so much more than she had wanted to acknowledge*” (p. 93) and that demonstrates how much they understand things despite their young age. In addition, because Ben used to have the full attention of Harriet, the children are prevented from having her time to take care of them. Paul for instance have not got the sufficient affection from his mother, he “*had fits of tears or of rage, throwing himself on the floor screaming, or battering at Harriet's knees, trying to get her attention, which never seemed to leave Ben*” (p. 81). Moreover, after Ben's return to the house from the institution, things have gotten worse, the children despise their mother, and now all that they see in her is that she is the reason of destroying their happiness. In other words, Harriet fails to cope with the new situation which consequently leads her to lose both control and confidence. Harriet wants to gather the children when she brings back Ben, “*but how they felt it, she knew, was that she had turned her*

back on them all and chosen to go off into alien country, with Ben” (p. 108), and it is then when she loses her four children while giving all the time and attention to educate and foster Ben.

In the same way, Olivia's attitude and expectations toward her mother changes after the death of her grandmother. Even though she is aware that her brother is having a special care because of his difference, she is always waiting for her mother to give her some of that attention as one can see in the following scene at one of her nights routine: “*“Don ’t forget to come back, ” I said as she left. “I promise.” But she didn ’t come back that night”*” (p. 98). Furthermore, after seeing her mother standing in front of August’s room door, the feeling of jealousy that overwhelmed her pushes her to wonder whether she has ever stood in front of hers like that. It is notable from the previous illustrations the shift of treatment, which once all was given to her, turns to his brother most of the time; thus, complaining about the lack of attention she receives from her parents is pointless.

As a matter of fact, Olivia's mother's lack of attention forced her to rely on herself from a young age. For instance, she knew that she would have to play something else whenever her brother needed to rest after some procedure, she says that if she wanted her parents to watch her play, she knows that they would mostly miss it because they are busy with August's therapy or a surgery (p.82). after witnessing what her brother went through she believed that it feels strange to cry over not having the doll she asks for or when her mother misses her school play. This complex situation is the reason for her self-reliance which accelerates her maturity. She learns how to not ask for her parents’ help which shows how mature she is at a very young age and she figures out how to do everything she needs by her own, such as:

how to put toys together, how to organize my life so I don’t miss friends’ birthday parties,how to stay on top of my schoolwork so I never fall behind in class. I’ve never asked for help with my homework. Never needed reminding to finish a project or study for a test. If I was having trouble with a subject in school, I’d go home and study it until I figured it out on my own. I taught myself how to convert fractions into decimal points by going online. I’ve done every school project pretty much by myself. (p. 83)

In other words, the fact that the parents of Olivia do not include her in the activities of the

disabled child August makes her feel that she is not that much important and that she is considered as a neglected member.

Burke (2004) confirms that “*the impact on siblings of having a brother or sister with disabilities will increase the sense of being ‘left out’ which often goes unrecognised within the family and requires a degree of family refocusing to correct*” (p. 45). It is crucial for parents to recognize that it is unfair for their other children to be left with the impression that they hold a second-class status within the family. By acknowledging and balancing the needs of all their children, parents can foster an environment that cultivates a strong sense of love and support for the entire family unit. This inclusive approach will have a lasting positive impact on all the children, helping them develop into well-adjusted and supported individuals as they navigate adulthood.

Subsequently, while parents need to be aware of their children’s needs, it is also essential that they understand the needs of their children’s siblings as well. Otherwise, these children will become angry and resentful toward their disabled siblings as well as their parents, believing that they are being prioritised over them and deprived of a normal childhood. Consequently, this neglect can strain the relationships between siblings, causing fractures and a sense of imbalance. When the needs of non-disabled siblings are not adequately addressed, their perception of inequality can lead to strained relationships and a breakdown of trust. Therefore, parents must strive to create an environment that supports the needs of all their children, fostering understanding, fairness, and harmony within the family unit.

In *The fifth child*, one can notice how children become relieved after moving in with their grandparents in order to keep away from Ben. Paul on one side, who is a charmer and *had not a mother at the proper time*” (p. 119) turned into an introverted child. He “*spent hours watching television. He escaped into it [...] and ate, but never put on weight*” (p. 129). On the other side, similarly to the relief of Ben’s siblings, Olivia in *Wonder* also feels free from August’s burden

after exploring another environment far from disability. When she goes to high school, which means that she is going to be separated from her brother, she finally “*could go there and be Olivia Pullman*” (p. 91) and not Via or the sister of the disabled child. It is the ideal opportunity for her to begin a new chapter without attachment to her disabled brother, allowing her to form genuine friendship relations such as the one with her boyfriend Justin who loves her before and after knowing about her brother’s condition.

What captures the attention in both novels is that the siblings of both Ben and August remains silent and their feelings are bottled up. In *The fifth child*, the children can understand many things about life and family without even discussing them with their parents. It is noteworthy how they never express their feelings directly; as they are eager to leave the house and how they plan to live away from home without informing their parents. Also in *Wonder*, August confirms that “*Via’s always been so calm and cool, but this year she’s had a couple of these kinds of fits*” (p. 74) which is strange to the family. In addition, one can notice the intensity of the conversation between Olivia and her mother as Palacio writes: “*“So you want to tell me what’s up?” she asked nicely, softly. “Not now, okay?” I answered. I was reading. I was tired. Maybe later I’d be up to telling her about Miranda, but not now*” (p.97) and that mainly reflects the mother’s negligence of her daughter and that they no longer have a strong relationship.

Furthermore, Burke (2004) argues that healthy “*siblings also share the stress experienced by their parents at the time of the birth of their disabled sibling or at the time when the realisation of disability sets in (Seligman 1991)*” (p. 45). In other words, the existence of a disabled child may lead the children to become mature and more responsible at a young age, as well as it pushes them to make an effort to provide as much support as possible to their parents to help them cope with the stress of having a child with a disability. Burke (2004) clarifies that:

Mayhew and Munn (1995) found that when siblings take on a caring role they form an unspoken alliance with their parents, which gave them a higher ‘status’ within the family; that does not equip them for the uncertainty of the adult world, however, and excessive responsibility will induce stress within the individual (p. 47).

This will ensure that the siblings would not become alienated from their parents or from each other due to the fact that they have to take care of their sibling who has a disability. This will help to ensure that the family as a whole remains close and happy despite the challenges associated with having a disabled child at home.

In *The fifth child*, we have seen that Ben's siblings decide to leave their home in order to live with their grandparents, however, they believe that it is the best decision for them and for their mother. On one side, they would have the affection that their mother has not afforded to them properly since it is all given to Ben. On the other side, Harriet would not be worried about her children's health and education, and that gives her more time to take care of her impaired child. Additionally, as shown in *Wonder*, Olivia is a great support for the family since she was a little child. She used to figure things out on her own, she says:

I've always said "good"—even when it hasn't always been so good. My worst day, worst fall, worst headache, worst bruise, worst cramp, worst mean thing anyone could say has always been nothing compared to what August has gone through. This isn't me being noble, by the way: it's just the way I know it is. (p. 83)

To put it in another way, putting herself and her needs in second place is her way to express the affection and care towards her disabled brother. Olivia feels compelled to protect her brother at all costs because of the stares and mockery he receives from others, and she does not care about the other people's points of views on her. August becomes able to open up about his problems and overcome them because of her, as well as he decides to return to school because she has been always by his side giving him advice. When he realises that his sister has sacrificed so much for him, he makes every effort to become more virtuous. Because of Olivia's presence and assistance, August is able to overcome his problems and gain confidence.

To conclude, most people believe that living in a family that has a disabled child may generally cause a negative attitude or experience for the members of the family. It is conceivable to assume that in most circumstances, parents will experience the everyday demands of care as

larger; and siblings are at risk of not always having typical childhood expectations realized. In other words, it is accurate that there will be a change and an adjustment within the family even though it is not necessarily to be a negative one. Yet, there are some families that may face some difficulties to bring together the siblings and the children with impairments in one house. It is important, therefore, for parents of children with disability to strike a balance in their parenting practices and make sure that the needs of all of their children are met.

IV. General Conclusion

Throughout my dissertation under the name of *The intersection of disability with marginalization in Doris Lessing's The fifth child (1988) and Raquel J. Palacio's Wonder (2012)*, an attempt is made to investigate the parallels between the two novels in terms of the relationship that exists between disability and marginalisation of both abled and disabled people. To accomplish my goal, I have relied on two major theories, which are Tobin Siebers's *Disability theory* (2008) and Peter Burke's *Brothers and sisters of disabled children* (2004); as well as a supportive one named *Disability studies reader* by Lennard J. David (2006). Despite the incomparability of the protagonists' situations, the concepts of disability and marginalization helped me come to the conclusion that Ben and August have experienced similar traumatic events and aspects such as segregation and resilience. In addition, one can deduce that the disabled children's siblings are overshadowed in both novels due to their parents' lack of attention.

All along the comparison of the two novels, I came to the conclusion that, in the first section of this research paper, the authors advocate strongly for the integration of disabled people into society and their full recognition as human beings. Furthermore, I have shown that rather than accepting disabled people as a way of distinguishing themselves from others, society has been marginalising and ignoring their existence for many years. As a result, I conclude that the social environment is crucial for disabled people who are excluded by society and family.

In the second section of my research paper, I have come to the deduction that despite the fact that parents face many difficult decisions when raising their children, especially when they have a disabled child, they prioritise the impaired one over their healthy children. It has also been observed that non-disabled children have needs and feelings that must be respected and cared for in the same way that every other member of the family does. But as a result, the failure in treating all children in the same way leads to resentment on the part of children who

do not have special needs toward those who do, and children become dissatisfied with their parents for ignoring their needs in favour of their siblings. The last conclusion that was drawn from the analysis is that both mothers play a crucial role in the novel's family harmony as they are the most influential in shaping the children's personalities.

Finally, despite what my research has investigated and the results that I have come to, many areas remain unexplored. Throughout my reading of the novel and my analysis, I have come to notice that the two novels have much more in common than the themes and the characters' experiences. It is possible then to consider studying the two novels from another perspective and to analyse the different writing styles. Having different cultural backgrounds makes the study even more interesting for future researchers to consider since one is American and the other is British.

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