

## Children Exploitation in John Burnside's *The Dumb House*

Hilalah Aldhafeeri<sup>1</sup> & Arbaayah Binti Ali Termizi<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract

This article examines the interdisciplinary ecocriticism in John Burnside's *The Dumb House* (1997). The study focuses on two critical perspectives. The first of these is ecocriticism. The main focus will be on two ecocritical concepts, dwelling and ecoconsciousness. The concept of dwelling will be mainly addressed by referring to Greg Garrard's postulation of dwelling and using it to analyze natural settings in fictional works. Dwelling, therefore, will be applied to analyze the novel's setting. Second, using ecoconsciousness, the analysis will draw on Cheryll Glotfelty's formulation of ecoconsciousness and its critical interface with other interdisciplinary approaches. Psychoanalysis will be the interdisciplinary method used, along with dwelling and ecoconsciousness. Sigmund Freud's concept of anxiety is the sole psychoanalytical concept that will be used in this study. Considering anxiety reveals the novel's protagonist's inner feelings, caused by repression and remembering the past. Thus the novel's natural setting is a remedial exit for the protagonist's anxiety.

**Keywords:** Anxiety, Burnside, Dwelling, Ecoconsciousness, Ecocriticism, Psychoanalysis

### I. Introduction

John Burnside's *The Dumb House* is a dazzling account of human inner sensation. The novel hinges on an anonymous narrator who is sometimes called Luke. He seems to be a medical student trying to do experiments on groups of children. He visits a place called Akbar and, at the same time, the Dumb House. The place is named after a Persian king who sends some dyslexic children there to learn how to speak. The narrator arrives at the Dumb House and meets some children, among whom is Karen. He begins doing medical experiments on Karen and the other children. Then, he becomes ruthless and cold. He loses human mercy and kills twins in an experiment. Later, he imprisons his own children in the Dumb House and torments them harshly. Burnside paints a picture of a ruthless human state in *The Dumb House*. He makes a call to deal with human ethics which are on the verge of deterioration and backwardness, as "each individual member redundantly evokes all other patterns, but the code for the total category is optimally simple" (Kaernbach et al., 2004, p.203). The novel offers a clear image of how human beings can descend into darker behaviour through negligence. Human darkness, here, refers to continual changes in the human psyche. Accordingly, Burnside's novel examines this human aspect in which "light and dark are similarly important as phenomenological touchstones in John Burnside's work, in ... the transformational aspect of darkness" (Gairn, 2008, p.186). This transformation of the human psyche can relate to tragic events happening to people during their life. These events may lead to totally new changes in human behaviour. Human beings may lose their humane characteristics and start performing abnormal actions. They sometimes act in an animalistic way because they have lost their real sensations. Moreover, Louisa Gairn (2008) asserts that "Burnside's work is full of strange twinings, relationships between real and imagined brothers, distorted versions of the self which seem to be both psychological and mysteriously 'organic'. Cases 'of wolf-boys, calf-children, infants raised by gazelles, pigs, bears and leopards' are contemplated in, *The Dumb House*" (p.175).

<sup>1</sup> Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Malaysia, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Serdang, Perdana, Fortune Park B-12-3A.

Email: [toorh2321@hotmail.com](mailto:toorh2321@hotmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Malaysia, Selangor, Kuala Lumpur, Serdang, Perdana, Fortune Park B-12-3A. Email: [arbaayah@upm.edu.my](mailto:arbaayah@upm.edu.my)

Burnside's *The Dumb House* also has another attribute of a deteriorating human psyche. It is the violent reactions that occur in the novel. Violence is caused by "spiritual failure". The narrator fails to achieve his longings and commits criminal acts. He conducts a fatal experiment on innocent children. Attila Dosa (2009) argues that "violence arises from the tendency to objectify others – humans, animals, terrain and so on – and spiritual enlightenment begins, I feel, in a first recognition that there are no objects in the world, that there is no possibility of being meaningfully 'objective'" (p.127). Dosa's notion of "spiritual enlightenment" indicates that "violence is the symptom of a spiritual failure, a failure to recognize the fundamental imperative to respect and honour 'the other'" (p.127). Here, however, violence begins when the narrator conducts scientific experiments on dumb children. Dosa concludes, "I think there is no need to reconcile one with the other. The world is violent, and I think we must investigate and try to understand that violence, especially in its subtler forms, for example the violence done to laboratory animals in the name of 'science', or the violence of poverty" (p.127). In this chapter, I will study deteriorating human sensations from a different perspective. I will focus on the protagonist's inner feelings. These feelings are disturbed and lack order. The study highlights the protagonist's anxiety caused by a social problem, namely, child exploitation. In *The Dumb House*, children are exploited for medical experimental purposes. As a result, the protagonist becomes anxious and torments his children at the end of the novel. The main focus of my study will be the interdisciplinary connection between ecocriticism and psychoanalysis. Accordingly, my study sheds light on three literary elements. First, child exploitation will be considered by examining the development of the protagonist's anxiety. Second, I will use Cheryll Glotfelty's concept of ecoconsciousness and Greg Garrard's concept of dwelling as ecocritical concepts. Consequently, ecoconsciousness will reveal the connection between ecocriticism and psychoanalysis. Dwelling, on the other hand, represents the novel's natural setting. Third, exploring the protagonist's anxiety will be followed by applying Sigmund Freud's concept of anxiety. Together, these concepts support my argument which stresses that nature is an exit for the protagonist's anxiety.

## II. Child Exploitation and Anxiety Development

From the beginning of *The Dumb House*, child exploitation is apparent. It begins gradually when the anonymous narrator goes to the Dumb House. On the way there, he thinks profoundly about children's destiny. The narrator, who is also the protagonist, imagines the negative results of experiments on children. Though he has not seen them, he is motivated by the idea of conducting such an experiment on children: "no one could say it was my choice to kill the twins, any more than it was my decision to bring them into the world. Each of these events was an inevitability, one thread in the fabric of what might be called destiny, for want of a better word" (p.3). The protagonist is afraid of his experiments. His initial characterization is benign and benevolent. Then he becomes somewhat harsh. Conducting an experiment on children haunts his inner imagination. The idea of exploiting children for an experiment occurs in a monologue at the beginning of the novel: "I chose to perform the laryngotomies, if only to halt their constant singing – if singing is what you would call it – that ululation that permeated my waking hours, and entered my sleep through every crevice of my dreams" (p.3).

The protagonist's inner state is unstable. He delays doing that experiment. But when he is disturbed by the children's singing, he decides to do it. This suggests how a stable character might transform into an unstable aggressive one. The main factor of his unstable character is the different neurotic attitudes which he adopts. In his book *A History of Literary Criticism: From Plato to the Present*, Rafey Habib (2005) proposes that neurosis is the prime cause of anxiety. As neurosis develops, the character begins to suffer psychological instability and disorder so that "neuroses might have a psychological rather than physiological origin" (p.574). In this way, neurosis is the driver of a schizophrenic personality and a symptom of anxiety, "viewed as arising from the damming-up of an emotional affect or impulse" (p.574). Therefore, the suggestion of the protagonist's unstable psyche is ascribed to his neurotic inner feelings. In considering everything regarding the experiment, the protagonist formulates a sound justification for it. He appears hesitant to conduct his work on children, but he convinces himself of the importance of doing his work, regardless of the results: "But this was not a conventional piece of work. There is no way to describe this experiment without describing everything that has happened" (p.4). He feels lost when deciding whether to complete his medical mission or not. All these feelings arise from his inner state. The need to conduct the experiment and its unfavourable effects contradict sharply. He is not able to distinguish between the morality of killing children and dedication to his work. Ultimately, he decides to enter the children's basement and commence his work: "That experiment is over now.

It was terminated, only in order that it might begin again, in a different form. If I know anything, I know this is the true pattern of our lives: a constant repetition, with small, yet significant variations, unfolding through the years. The experiment with the twins was just one variation on a lifelong theme" (pp.3–4). When he goes into the basement, he contemplates the children's awful life: "I locked the door of the basement room, leaving the twins inside, silenced now, gazing at one another with these expressions of grieved bewilderment that finally made it possible for the experiment to continue" (p.4). The protagonist's inner feelings and his behaviour reach a turning point. His hesitation ebbs away and he decides to accomplish his work. However, his instability is still progressing. The psychological state of the protagonist is described in terms of intersubjectivity, which appears when a person is stimulated by different feelings and situations. Neurotic feelings, therefore, "can take on a range of different forms, and these forms, again, can be more or less adequate to living up to the intrinsic needs of intersubjective contact" (Russon, 2003, p.75). The protagonist's anxious reactions yield to his agitated state at the beginning. This demonstrates his transformation into another psychological state as a result of "problems of human development primarily in terms of the notions of intersubjective recognition, familiarity, and memory" (p.75). John Russon's treatment of intersubjectivity refers to psychological drives. These drives continue to develop in a persistent manner until they affect the observable nature of individuals. Inner anxious feelings arise from conflicting consciousness and the "dynamism of conflict and resolution has, however, an implicit operation as well" (p.76). In *The Dumb House*, the protagonist begins his work at the Dumb House. He uses different methods to pursue his experiment. He gives some poisoned food to the children in order to begin it. But he is afraid of someone seeing him. Here, fear and anxiety culminate and come close together. He is afraid of something not unknown. His fear springs from his neurotic anxiety that he is doing something unethical: "Outside, I put my eye to the observation grille for a last look, they seemed not to have noticed my departure. Quietly I left them to digest their poisoned meal, went upstairs to check on Karen, then made a pot of coffee and waited" (p.4).

Then, when he feels sure that nobody has seen him he goes back to the twins to check if they are still alive. However, he finds them dead and motionless. As he looks at them, he has the same inner feelings. The scene of the children's death moves him. He feels sorry for their tragic death. But he is not deeply affected by their end. Conducting the experiment is his main goal, whatever happens to the children: "Later, when I went down to the basement, the twins were dead. They lay on the floor near one of the speakers; they were huddled together, embracing one another in a way that reminded me of young monkeys, the way they cling to anything when they are frightened" (p.7). The protagonist's divided situation embodies his frustration. Being in such a mood, he is not certain of his involvement in killing the children. Here, inner neurosis formulates as a groundbreaking behaviour in his personality. Neurosis is the first phase of his anxiety. In *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*, Otto Fenichel (2005) illustrates the first phases of neurotic anxiety. Fenichel contends that "the earliest phases must be comprehended by means of the expressions 'excitation' and 'relaxation,' and only the later phases can be characterized in more definite and differentiated terms" (p.31). Fenichel's argument highlights the basic development of anxiety through neurotic conflict, between the "external world" and inner excitement: "the taking in of the external world (perception), the mastery of the motor apparatus (motility)" (p.31).

In *The Dumb House*, the protagonist's problems determine his apprehensive psyche. Although he kills the children, he is afraid of them, even when they are dead: "I think, even then, that I was afraid of them, afraid they were tricking me in some inexplicable fashion, afraid they were not really dead, but pretending, hoping to catch me unawares" (p.7). Furthermore, he considers the children to be happier than him because they lived their life as a paradise in the Dumb House. Yet, he contrasts his state to theirs. He is not content with his life due to his fear and anxiety: "So the children of the Dumb House knew the world as God did: their Eden was always newly-created, as it was in the beginning" (p.26). The protagonist is increasingly distracted by his new experience. He does not have any idea of the children's life before coming to the Dumb House. His new experience inflicts on him a new visualization of human relations. The Dumb House's children change his perceptions for better human co-existence as "the dark shadow and death closing in draws the line of demarcation between the possibilities and tasks that are recurrent" (Lingis, 1996, p.6). This new state is a result of his neurotic psyche. In neurotic cases, the internal transformation of individual characters is traced through the new incidents they face.

Furthermore, they encounter abnormal situations where radical transformation “is based on the assumption that the neurotic patient represses certain psychic contents because they are morally incompatible with his conscious values” (Jung, 2001, p.993). The protagonist’s case, thus, reveals the reasons behind his neuroticism. After his first day in the Dumb House, the protagonist develops a walking guilt complex, burdened with anxiety and doubt. Because he has not been properly educated to confront the realities of the external world or the inner world, he has been indoctrinated with admonitions against interfering with others’ rights. When he recalls his life with his mother, he longs for domestic traditions: “When I was a child, Mother would come into the bedroom and tell me stories” (p.9). The culmination of his anxiety springs from his desire for the Dumb House to be like his mother’s house: “But the story of Akbar and the Dumb House held my attention; I found images, not only of the house itself, but of those who had initiated the experiment, those who had to live with its consequences” (p.26). Later on, he is surprised by the inimical reality of the Dumb House. He is stricken by the harsh treatment of the children imprisoned there. Consequently, he cannot make a crucial retreat. He carries the burden of his work and empirical experiment. From this point on, the individuality of the protagonist is split between different and conflicting desires. The case of a split character triggers a rebellion in the inner feelings of neurotic individuals and “the rebellion and its reprimand seemed to be caught up in the same terms ... the prevailing law threatened one with trouble, even put one in trouble, all to keep one out of trouble” (Butler, 2001, 2488). The protagonist concedes to his work in the Dumb House. His work prompts a breakthrough in his psyche. He is not as comfortable as he used to be in his mother’s house. In sharp contrast, the Dumb House puts him in monstrous place, where his psyche becomes anxious. Anxiety, in this way, is determined by external motivations. The protagonist is not at rest at the beginning, and because sin and neurosis have been inadvertently glamorized by prohibition, he has developed a morbid compulsion for them. In *The Dumb House*, there seems to be more than one group of children. At the beginning of the novel, a group of children are killed by a poisonous meal. Additionally, there is another group suffering severe torture: “So later, when the children were found incapable of speech, the counsellors must have considered themselves responsible, in some part, for an appalling act of torture, as they witnessed the infants, empty-minded and soulless, wandering helplessly in an unnamed world” (p.27). Here the protagonist holds the counsellors responsible for torturing the children. From this perspective, he appears benign and humane. He is resentful of the counsellors’ blatant acts.

Then, he imagines himself talking to the children about their tough lives: “They must have asked themselves what kind of world that was – how terrible, how beautiful, how frightening in its autonomy, in its refusal to be defined” (p.27). Together, the children’s terrible life and the harsh counsellors urge the protagonist to contemplate the apparent contradiction between human benevolence and evil: “In fact, the original story of the Dumb House was simple and fleeting. In that version, the Mughal’s counsellors were debating where a child is born with the innate, God-given ability to speak; they had agreed this gift is equivalent in some way to the soul, the one characteristic that marks out the human from the animal” (p.9). The protagonist now ponders the counsellors’ purpose in torturing the children. They are asked by Mughal to conduct a medical experiment on the children. Mughal wants to know the original source of human speech. The experiment and its tormenting results are negotiated at the expense of the children’s lives. Again, the protagonist concludes that the counsellors are doing the experiment for the same purpose.

The children story stirs the protagonist’s inner feelings. He thinks about their situation and the duration of their stay in the Dumb House. He also discovers that even the children’s servants (attendants) suffer from speech problems: “Nobody knows how long it stood, or what happened to the children who were locked inside with their mute attendants” (p.9). The protagonist’s bewilderment relates to moral privileges. In relation to this, Jacques Lacan (1957) discusses “transmutations”, the features of psychic individuals in “The Legacy of the Letter in the Unconscious”. Lacan says that a phobia is an essential interrogation aroused in persons who suffer from phobia and perversion. He further asserts that “the difficulty begins when one asks, *what* symptom? Phobia says one, perversion, says another, both, says a third. It seems in the last case that nothing more can be said: not that interesting transmutations of the object of phobia into a fetish do not occur, but if they are interesting it is precisely on account of the difference of their place in the structure” (p.1304). In light of Lacan’s proposal, people construct phobias and perversions and repress them in order to evade their anxiety. In *The Dumb House*, the protagonist’s anxiety provides evidence of his increasing phobia. He recollects memories of his mother’s house where simplicity and a “perfect” life were better than anything. Then, he even describes his new life in the Dumb House as dull and disappointing. These feelings are the basic elements of his phobia and perversions.

His discontent with the counsellors' experiments causes him to become cruel and lacking in simplicity: "I became enmeshed in a view of the world: an expectation, a secret fear. Even now nothing seems more beautiful to me than language when it creates the impression of order: the naming of things after their true nature" (p.11). For a while, the protagonist observes how Akbar and his counsellors conclude that the children cannot speak because they have never heard anybody talking in front of them. The protagonist's emotions sympathize with the children, since Akbar exploits them for his own benefit: "The children were well cared for, and were provided with everything they need, but because their attendants were Dumb, the never heard human speech, and they grew up unable to talk, as Akbar had predicted" (p.10). The protagonist is not necessarily evil; he is, as in his childhood life, curious to know the children's destiny. But because of the severity of Akbar's taboos about speech impulses, his curiosity becomes an obsession. His dramatic reactions in the Dumb House are typical of what happens in actual cases of extreme repression. Repression is the accumulation of anxious fear. Anxiety can be connected to the place in which it arises, and therefore, "it is an image that constitutes the matrix of imaginary, of recognition/misrecognition and identification, and hence of the first articulation of the I, of subjectivity" (Mulvey, 2001, p.2185). Here, anxiety is in accordance with "pleasurable structures of looking in the conventional cinematic situation" (p.2815). The protagonist, for example, aspires to conclude his experiment on the children pleasurably. But he is made perverse by the Dumb House's periphery. The isolated dull setting of the Dumb House contributes to his growing anxiety. The following section analyzes this setting by using Garrard's concept of dwelling.

### III. Scenes of Dwelling

*The Dumb House's* setting abounds with natural scenes. The scenes formulate different places where the events take place. The protagonist recalls his life with his mother. His recurring memory is of natural scenes which attract his interest. The novel later develops through a natural setting which exemplifies the protagonist's search for an exit from anxiety. His remembrance of past natural scenes paves the way for deducing his tendency to nature and a serene life: "In addition to these rituals of deceit and propitiation, I gave myself the task of listing by name all the flowers in her garden: first the irises, which she prized more than the others, then the lilies, the pinks, the roses, the shrubs and climbers, the fruit trees trained against the walls. When that was finished I moved on to something else, compiling lists of scientific terms and place names" (p.19). The protagonist, here, describes his radical transformation from living a natural peaceful life to a scientific terse one. He finds himself thrown into a different natural scene. The transformation of individuals in light of nature and belonging is tackled in Greg Garrard's simply titled book, *Ecocriticism*. Garrard (2004) forges a number of literary concepts relating to the application of ecocriticism to literature. My main focus will be on the concept of dwelling because it has a close affinity with the definition of and discerning the effects of natural places in literary works. Furthermore, my focus will highlight an analysis of *The Dumb House* setting. Garrard asserts that dwelling exposes "the possibility of coming to dwell on the earth in a relation of duty and responsibility" (p.108). Dwelling, accordingly, is a comprehensive concept connecting human beings' responsibilities and their surroundings. Human beings dwell in certain places to perform intentional duties and "rituals" (p.108).

In *The Dumb House*, the responsibility of the protagonist is his work, a duty. He comes to dwell in the Dumb House for a scientific experiment. Obviously, he talks about his mission in the Dumb House explicitly. He compares his current life with his perfect past life, which cannot be regained. The point of difference in his life now is that he is living a new life which he cannot change: "What disturbs me now is the possibility that language might fail: after the experiment ended so inconclusively, I cannot help imagining that the order which seems inherent in things is only a construct, that everything might fall into chaos, somewhere in the long white reaches of forgetting" (p.11). From this textual mark, Burnside paints a vivid picture of the protagonist's inner feelings. He is not balanced and cannot compare his past with his present one. In addition, dwelling had an integral effect on his psyche when he "became immersed in a view of the world: an expectation, a secret fear" (p.11). In this regard, the "view of the world" is a new life with the scientific experiment in the Dumb House. Duty and responsibility are strongly connected with the concept of dwelling. Each significant place in nature is astonishingly represented in a certain manner to produce tangible effects. Michael Bennett and David Teague (1999) claim that "it could also be argued that those who adopt this perspective misunderstand the potential of the urban environment to touch the 'soul.' Although the urban environment may potentially threaten moral connections" (p.200).

Bennett and Teague emphasize the effects of the urban environment within a moral framework. Morality is linked to urban places where "it does not *necessarily* preclude the sense of oneness that is a catalyst for a shift in moral perception" (p.200). Morality, therefore, cannot be separated from the individual's perception of urban life. It is also an "episodic memory, the postulation of "schemata" for everything from stories to selves" (Neisser and Winograd, 1988, p.2). In *The Dumb House*, the protagonist undergoes primary "shifts". He is stunned by the amoral experiments on the children in the Dumb House. After that, he dedicates himself to his experiment as a "duty" he should complete. The Dumb House's periphery is an environmental place for his contemplation of life past and present: "I lived entirely in the presence of my mother. Even when she wasn't there, I was aware of her, somewhere, and I always conscious of myself" (p.11). Simultaneously, he remembers his work in the Dumb House. He is asked to do his work with the dumb children and Karen: "That is why it is imperative for me to begin again, and that is why Karen was sent here, after all this time, to fulfil her true purpose" (p.11). Morality, on the other hand, hinges on Karen's position. She is "sent" to the Dumb House to achieve her purpose which, at the same time, is the purpose of Akbar and his counsellors, to conduct experiments on children. All at once, the juxtaposition of morality, tranquillity, work and duty entwine in a dwelling, i.e. *The Dumb House* setting: "Karen Olerud is upstairs, still asleep in her soft prison. I am, to all intents and purposes, alone. Now, at last, I can begin again" (p.7). Additionally, Garrard develops his argumentation for the concept of dwelling. He affirms that dwelling has a further acquaintance with permanent residence in environmental places. Thus, dwelling is not ephemeral. It also does not change according to the environmental surroundings. It is examined through different human phenomena, such as memory, ancestry and death, rituals, life, work and so forth. Inasmuch as this phenomena exist, Garrard (2004) believes that "'dwelling' is not a transient state; rather, it implies the long-term imbrication of humans in a landscape of memory, ancestry and death, of ritual, life and work" (108). The word "imbrications" includes diverse literary dimensions of "dwelling" (p.108).

*The Dumb House* presents different dimensions of dwelling. The first of these dimensions is memory. Originally, memory is one of various human phenomenological features. Almost the entire first part of the novel falls into the category of memory. The protagonist remembers his mother's life. Moreover, he recollects his own life with his mother: "I remember it still – the memory is clear and indisputable: I am standing in the garden, and mother is saying the word *rose* over and over, reciting it like a magic spell and pointing to the blossoms on the trellis, sugar-pink and slightly overblown – and I am listening, watching her lips move, still trying to disconnect the flower from the sound" (p.7). Ancestry and death are other human aspects applicable to *The Dumb House*. The sole ancestry of the protagonist is his father and mother. He repeatedly mentions his mother in different situations. However, he rarely remembers or mentions his father, except in the first parts of the novel. When he recalls his mother, he remembers good manners and moral perfection. In contrast, his father was cruel and harsh, so that he neglected the protagonist and his mother: "I always behaved as if she were with me, watching and listening. My father, on the other hand, seemed barely present. Most of the time, I disregarded him, just as mother did. He seemed peripheral to our existence, irrelevant to our enterprise and, at the time, I thought he preferred it that way" (pp.11–12). The example of father and mother is a domestic multifariousness where the environment displays the "fundamental inadequacy of the urban environment itself – its inability to sustain human life and community" (Bennett and Teague, 1999, p.200).

Furthermore, the protagonist's new life is also set in an environmental place. The environmental setting adds a conceptual appreciation of natural scenes. *The Dumb House* is set in a historical place surrounded by gardens and trees. The protagonist also finds himself in a forest-like place where dense trees and gardens surround the Dumb House. He calls the Dumb House "Gang Mahal", where people used to "travel" to visit this monumental building. The most distinctive attribute of this building is the gardens and environmental scenes outside: "People would travel from all the kingdom to visit the House. They would stand for hours outside its walled gardens, listening to the silence, and for years to come the mansion was known as the Gang Mahal, or Dumb House" (p.10). In addition, this place is the background for harsh child torture. After the children are poisoned at the beginning of the novel, the protagonist lives in tranquillity after their deaths. This is another phenomenological feature of human dwelling. The children's deaths are tackled along with ancestry. Shortly after the children's deaths, the protagonist remembers his mother who is an elemental part of his ancestry: "It seems odd now, this silence. Perhaps it was what I expected all along; perhaps it was what I wanted. This silence is more than the absence of sound ... I can begin at the beginning, with mother in her fine clothes, coming to my room in the evenings to read me stories" (p.4).

Other imbrications of dwelling are rituals. Dwelling rituals can stem from “strength from the subsequent episode in the fabulous journey of discovery” (Rosendale, 2002, p.36). Rituals exhibit human ways of living in definitive circumambience, where “the written description or visual representation of a natural landscape frequently is worth more than the place itself” (p.39). Here, Steven Rosendale explains the importance of the “description” of natural places, vis-à-vis human rituals. Natural places themselves are not live components of environmental scenes. Instead, they are the live natural components described by inhabitants.

In *The Dumb House*, the protagonist describes different natural places where he went in the past. He lived a calm and stable life with his mother. His mother described the rituals of human lodging in terms of animals which are essential elements of environmental nature. A striking point in his mother’s descriptions is the mix of death and living at the same time. These are the very features of Garrard’s concept of dwelling: “She said every animal had a place of its own where it would go to die if it would; wild animals wanted to be alone when they were sick or dying, and they would crawl away into the undergrowth, to be out of the light and wind” (p.15). In his intensive treatment of dwelling, Garrard (2004) illustrates the “primitive models” that explicate the concept of dwelling. These models are “exemplary of an authentic dwelling on earth” (p.108). To connect Garrard’s notion of “primitive model” to dwelling, *The Dumb House* supplies two different life patterns. The first one is the protagonist’s previous life, and the second is his life in the Dumb House. However, his previous life is more perfect, though it is primitive. He remembers some animals’ deaths. Animals embody the primitive factors of urban life: “The only dead things I had seen until then were pheasants and hedgehogs on the road to the village, but mother had a gift for knowing where to look: animals I had only ever encountered in books became real as corpses” (pp.15–16). Perhaps remembering the past is full of environmental scenes. The protagonist tries to recollect his memories, longing for serenity after he has become agitated by the monstrous treatment of the children. Burnside’s *The Dumb House* circles around and around between essential considerations of the environmental world and the perpetual suggestiveness of natural phenomena. Appreciating this quality of suspension within the novel relies on registering natural details in their specific particularity. By remembering past domestic life “we project a human presence on the otherness of nature” (Armbruster *et al.*, 2001, 322). The protagonist “projects” his perfect life by remembering how animals led a peaceful life: “There was always something new to see, something strangely beautiful – not only in summer, when the bodies imploded slowly and the smell was dark and sickly, but also in autumn and winter, when they lay for weeks, cold and untarnished, frozen voles laid out on the grass, small birds lying under the hedges with their legs stretched, their eyes clenched and wrinkled” (p.16).

*The Dumb House* also presents another environmental setting. It is the Dumb House itself. The protagonist does not know the Dumb House or Gang Mahal. But he knew that latter through his mother: “It was my mother who told me the story of Akbar: how he built the Dumb House, not for profit, or even to prove a point, but from pure curiosity. Nobody knows how long it stood, or what happened to the children who were locked inside with their mute attendants” (p.9). The setting of *The Dumb House* comprises disastrous events exemplified in the death and torturing of children. Such disastrous actions are conducted by human beings. They can harm both human and non-human beings because “disasters here, while usually man-made, may also be natural in their origins, although the category of the natural disaster nearly always involves some degree of human interference” (Huggan, 2012, p.100).

Graham Huggan’s investigation of disastrous human action correlates with the treatment of the children in *The Dumb House*. The scientific and medical experiments conducted on the children do not occur naturally. They are done by human beings. Akbar and his counsellors started the experiments. The protagonist is also involved in conducting the experiments. Nevertheless, he is still distracted by the harsh treatment inflicted on the children. His distraction, however, still clings to his description of the environmental surroundings. He depicts the Dumb House as his mother told him. He reaches the Dumb House to do experiments, but he is surprised by the inhuman treatment taking place in a dark and ghastly place: “Nobody knows because the story of the Dumb House was only ever an episode in another, much longer story, an anecdote that had been folded in, told in passing to illustrate the personality of Akbar the Mughal” (p.9). After his discovery, he concedes that the children live in a macabre environment. They are not well cared for, not what he expected before coming to the Dumb House: “They existed in a different world: the world of laboratory rats, or the shifting and functionless space of the truly autistic” (p.3). The children’s case is the gathering nexus of a frightening setting.

They are a tool in a social problem, the problem of exploiting innocent children for medical experiments. Garrard proposes (2004) that the absence of human mutual recognition is harmful to the human community. This is the core of the concept of dwelling. There should be reciprocal relations among people in order to appreciate each other, "to be fully human, then, is to be a part of such a community. More ominously, the reverse is logically true too: not to belong to such a community is to be less than human, although one might say so either as a lament or an indictment" (p.115). Garrard, furthermore, focuses on the territorial peculiarities of environmental places.

Environmental places in *The Dumb House* are various. The protagonist describes the placid surroundings of the Dumb House. He could not even find a fish nearby. Therefore, the place also lacks visitors: "I was certain the place we usually chose was wholly suitable. I never saw a fish there, in all our visits" (p.12). In addition to placid places, there are different ranges of hills close to the Dumb House: "I stopped at Silbury Hill look at a new crop circle that had appeared in a field, directly to the south of the mound. It was a clear day; the path to the hill was narrow, overgrown in places with tall grasses and wild geraniums. I walked around the base, looking for a gap in the fence where I could get through" (pp.23–24). In this way, the protagonist is dazzled by the environmental surroundings because he projects his past life onto the present. There is no fair community in the Dumb House. Akbar exploits the children for the sake of scientific experiments. As a result, the protagonist's mercy ebbs away as he conducts the first experiment. He torments his own twins during the experiment. He does not even admit they are his "kinship" or sons: "I knew from the first that it was an error to think of the twins as *my* children, whatever the biological reality" (p.145). Then he adds: "Nevertheless, I was aware that the twins had been responsible, not only for her death, but also for the pain she had suffered, and for that reason alone, I was free of any instinctive sense of kinship, any desire to protect or nurture them that I might otherwise have possessed" (p.145). The protagonist's transformation reaches its pinnacle when he loses his merciful sensation. He becomes cold and does not react to the unsympathetic treatment of the children. He wants more experiments. He even wants to dissect the children's bodies for successful experiments: "From that moment on, I lost interest in the road-kills and the dead birds I found in the woods. There is something beautiful in the stillness of death, in its irreversibility. But after a time, I wanted more than entry to a corpse. I want to open up the living creature, to see the heartbeat and how the blood worked" (p.65). This example illustrates the critical transformation of the protagonist into being very harsh.

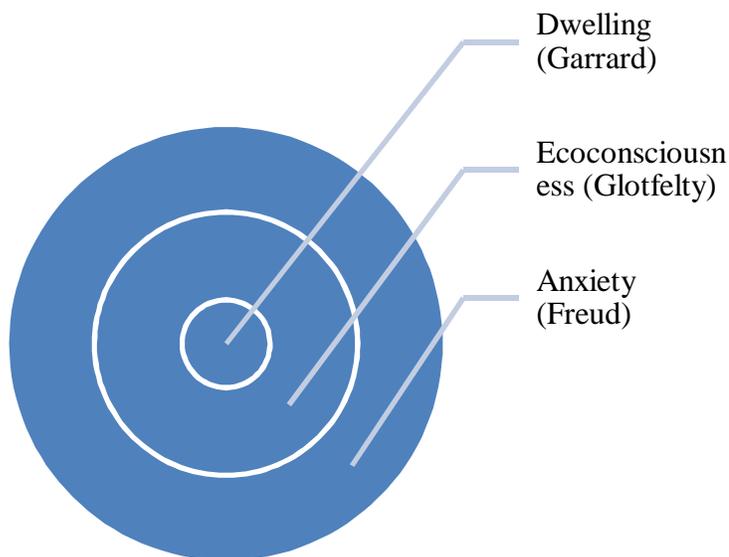
The protagonist's new state breaks with all normal human morality. He is affected by his experiments. His interest in conducting experiments on children obliterates human common symbiosis. In *Literature and the Environment*, Louise Westling (2014) suggests that "there is nature understood as the other of culture, that which arises of itself without human agency. It may be revered as wilderness or pristine animality, or feared as the bestial and cruelly inhuman" (p.75). Here, Westling observes the human element as the primal agent used by human beings to make use of others in environmental places. Westling's idea resembles Garrard's assertion that "the figure of dwelling is crucial, as it inflects nature as the troubled ground of work, knowledge, economy and responsibility" (p.134). In *The Dumb House*, Burnside describes different locations where the exploitation of children happens. Whenever the protagonist talks about the setting of the Dumb House, he mentions the environmental surroundings unintentionally. In the following example, he talks about Mrs Olerud's House, where she is tortured along with the children. At the same time, he mentions gardens and other natural surroundings: "The other houses were grey-brown, but Mrs Olerud's was painted white, so it looked like a piece of wedding cake left out to crumble and dry in the evening sunlight. None of the gardens was well-tended, but number twenty-six was particularly untidy, overgrown with bindweed and huge patches of Yorkshire Fog, it looked like a patch of waste ground" (p.33). The protagonist's resort to natural scenes demonstrates his craving for the alleviation of anxiety.

#### IV. Anxiety and a Natural Outlet

As I argue in previous sections, anxiety develops out of a primary transformation in the protagonist's psyche. Before reaching the Dumb House, he is benevolent and has human good sensations. Yet, his work "duty" gradually forces him to become harsh. As a result, he becomes cruel and kills some of the children in the Dumb House. To escape the bitter treatment of the children, he contemplates the natural surroundings when he lived with his mother. Anxiety springs out of his divided feelings between a perfect domestic life and the necessity of doing dutiful work. Then, the environmental surroundings of the Dumb House attracted him. *The Dumb House* is set in a very environmental scene.

This scene represents the protagonist's outlet for his inhuman work at the Dumb House. Through these natural scenes, anxiety culminates in the protagonist's comparison of a past perfect life with his current life. That life connects all human characteristic attributes, such as morality, ancestry, death and the like to a natural environment. These attributes are expounded by using Garrard's concept of dwelling. Ultimately, the protagonist decides to be faithful to his experimental work, even though it contradicts his human morality. This section delves into analyzing the protagonist's feelings by using Sigmund Freud's concept of anxiety. It aims to explore how the natural environment, including forests, gardens, darkness and so on, are ideal exits from anxiety. Given these points, the analysis reveals how the protagonist reverts to natural scenes to alleviate his anxiety.

Before embarking an analysis of the protagonist's anxiety, I will utilize Cheryll Glotfelty's conceptualization of ecoconsciousness. Glotfelty maintains that ecoconsciousness designates the interdisciplinary nature of ecocriticism. Glotfelty further (1996) asserts that "ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature" (p.xix). Accordingly, ecoconsciousness mixes the application of ecocriticism with other cultural disciplines within literary works. In her definition of the interdisciplinary nature of ecocriticism, Glotfelty classifies psychology as one of the "cultural artifacts" which can be used to study literary works: "Psychology has long ignored nature in its theories of the human mind. A handful of contemporary psychologists, however, are exporting the linkages between environmental conditions and mental health, some regarding the modern estrangement from nature as the basis of our social and psychological ills" (p.xxi). Applying ecocriticism results in an interdisciplinary analysis of literary themes or artefacts. My focus will be on psychoanalysis as another interdisciplinary approach to the protagonist's inner feelings in *The Dumb House*. I will mainly use Freud's concept of anxiety to scrutinize the protagonist's anxiety. Furthermore, ecoconsciousness connects the concepts of dwelling and anxiety in a textual analysis of the protagonist's inner feelings. The figure below illustrates the interdisciplinary relationship between ecocriticism and psychoanalysis. More specifically, my study takes the concept of dwelling from ecocriticism and that of anxiety from psychoanalysis. In the centre, ecoconsciousness leads to dwelling. Dwelling involves anxiety which finds mitigation in natural scenes.



**Figure 4.1 Ecocriticism and Psychoanalysis' Interdisciplinary Relationship**

From the beginning, the protagonist's anxiety stems from killing the children in the Dumb House. He declares that clearly: "Perhaps my anxiety was justified. For some reason, that was a year of surprising and unexplained deaths" (p.19). Besides, he reveals his inner feelings in the course of the novel. When he later conducts medical experiments, he recognizes his moral flaws and repents of his work: "I knew from the first that it was an error to think of the twins as my children, whatever the biological reality.

It's only a flaw in the language that confuses kinship with possession, and in this case the kinship was accidental" (p.145). An indication of the protagonist's anxiety comes out of his repressed feelings, which are torn between "duty" and "morality". In his theorization of anxiety, Freud argues that anxiety is one consequence of repression. As people repress tragic incidents or undesired feelings, they become anxious and their behaviour transforms according to their degree of anxiety: "The problem of how anxiety arises in connection with repression may be no simple one; but we may legitimately hold firmly to the idea that the ego is the actual seat of anxiety and give up our earlier view that the cathetic energy of the repressed impulse is automatically turned into anxiety" (Smith, 2007, p.4253).

In relation to Freud's argumentation, the protagonist's anxiety comes from his repression. In the initial events, he narrates his past life with his mother. The advent of the Dumb House makes him more atrocious. He represses his feelings by remembering the past. When he conducts his experiment on the children, he regrets his actions and longs to go outside from the Dumb House to escape his morbid new world: "While I was there I felt there was nothing to stop me from getting into the car and driving me away, back towards the west, moving from one crop disturbance to the next, pretending I was solving the mystery, growing into it, vanishing from the world I had inhabited all my life" (p.25). Yet this escape is directed towards natural scenes. He leaves the Dumb House for a walk in the surrounding gardens when rain is falling: It was eleven o'clock. I pulled the sheet up over her face, and went outside. I stood in the hall for several minutes, trying to decide what to do, then I went out for a walk. It was raining. The road to the village was covered with dark, oily puddles, and the cattle in the fields stood huddled for shelter under an oak tree ... I walked as far as the edge of the village, letting the rain trickle through my hair and run down my face, cleansing me of something, of some last vestige of ordinary being. (p.75) Environmental phenomena, like rain and trees, undoubtedly form an exit for the protagonist. He has been moved by torturing the children. His predicament is a social problem typified in killing and exploiting children. This experience intensifies the symptoms of his anxiety because "a symptom is a sign of, and a substitute for, an instinctual satisfaction which he remained in abeyance; it is a consequence of the process of repression" (Smith, 2007, p.4252). Hopelessness and fear, in addition, are determining features of anxiety, whereby "fear, often considered the opposite of hope, is typically absent in the experience of hopelessness" (Scioli and Biller, 2009, p.251).

In an ecological atmosphere, "'consciousness' raising is its most important task" (Glotfelty, 1996, p.xxiv). Glotfelty highlights the conscious appreciation of environmental surroundings. But this appreciation is insinuated by a psychological commentary. A suitable psychological commentary is anxiety and its inclusive symptoms. For example, the protagonist comments on his upset when resting in the Dumb House: "I woke in the dark. The room was still, but someone else was there. I could feel it; I had that sense of being watched I sat up quickly and fumbled for the bedside light" (p.164). His upset imparts his utter anxiety. This is a symptom of a turbulent psychology which makes people changeable. Person's changeability by its very nature involves anxiety. They try therapeutic exits, whereby "anxiety is imaged in its negative sense in terms of a departure from an unproblematized acceptance of public health routines, towards greater, if misguided, reflection" (Leach and Fairhead, 2007, p.3). In *The Dumb House*, the protagonist insistently yearns for natural tranquillity. He leaves the Dumb House for some rest. He chooses natural places like the sea to assuage his anxious feelings: "I was even on the point of leaving the twins in the basement for a few days, just to get away, to drive to the coast and listen to the sea, or go for a long walk in the hills, or hear the wind, the sheep in the fields, the skylarks" (p.177). When he was in the Dumb House, he used to speculate about natural scenes to seek some respite to forget his suffering from living with the children. He describes his frustrated feelings. He wants to ease his restlessness caused by harsh work: "I went down and fixed myself a cold drink; then I walked from room to room, peering into each moonlit space as if it were somewhere entirely new, a stranger's house where I had woken up by chance" (p.174).

Mitigating anxious reactions mingles with natural circumferences. In environmental places, writers tend to evaluate that "nature-oriented literature can help redirect us from ego-consciousness to 'eco-consciousness'" (Glotfelty, 1996, p.xxx). Glotfelty's insists on connecting eco-elements to psychological ones to restore the indispensable concept of eco-consciousness. She asserts that ego-consciousness is the basis for eco-consciousness. The point is that ego-consciousness is an essential characteristic of anxiety. Because repression (inhibition) is a fundamental cause of anxiety, the ego engages in "self-punishment" of the psyche (Smith, 2007, p.4251). In ego-consciousness "there are clearly also inhibitions which serve the purpose of self-punishment.

This is often the case in inhibitions of professional activities. The ego is not allowed to carry on those activities, because they would bring success" (p.4251). In this manner, ego-consciousness is another element of anxiety. The relationship between the protagonist's anxiety and natural scenes is apparent in *The Dumb House*. He is aware of his anxious feelings, which are affected by the children's treatment in an unfavourable way: "Now, after my months with the twins, I felt different. Sometimes it was as if every detail was too exquisite to bear: a single petal drifting across the lawn, a single drop of rain suspended on a twig, the first flakes of snow that fell out of a blue-black sky – everything was present" (p.193). He suffers from living through some distressing months in the Dumb House. So he decides to go to nearby surroundings to experience some calmness: "at the same time, I felt completely attuned to my surroundings. Every change in the light, every new sound, every change registered with me at a purely physical level" (p.193).

In addition, the protagonist goes down again, to the children's basement. When he comes back, he feels better than before, because he lets his anxiety be mitigated by natural scenes. As a result, his "old fear" seems to be less than before: "I went down to the basement and, in spite of my old fear that they were still alive somehow, still waiting to catch me out, I retrieved their cooling bodies and carried them out into the garden" (p.197). Glotfelty (1996) discusses the mitigation of anxious consciousness, where "specific features of the landscape help people remember the stories, and the stories help them to live in the land; traveling through the storied landscape corresponds to an interior journey of awareness and imagination in which the traveler grasps his or her cultural identity" (p.xxxi). Glotfelty's discussion of anxious consciousness links anxiety to psychological problems. Additionally, Freud believes that: "...the ego withdraws its (preconscious) cathexis from the instinctual representative that is to be repressed and uses that cathexis for the purpose of releasing unpleasure (anxiety). The problem of how anxiety arises in connection with repression may be no simple one; but we may legitimately hold firmly to the idea that the ego is the actual seat of anxiety and give up our earlier view that the cathetic energy of the repressed impulse is automatically turned into anxiety. (Smith, 2007, 4253) Taking anxiety into account, environmental scenes reproduce a channel for anxious inner feelings. In *The Dumb House*, the protagonist always associates his cruel behaviour with natural elements: "One evening, only days after I had decided to kill the twins, I was standing at the side door, in a dark place I usually only passed through, where nothing grew but ivy and periwinkle" (p.193).

Here, environmental scenes actualize his true exit from anxiety. The protagonist does not stop talking about natural scenes in relation to his anxiety: "I suppose I was standing out there that night in the hope of catching him. I know I was listening, watching. Then, as I caught the first hint of autumn in the air, the merest hint of water and caramel..." (p.194). Even when he buries the children, he mentions some environmental elements, like earth and flowers, "I laid the children next to their mother, in the iris garden, turning the bodies so they lay face to face in the wet earth" (pp.197–198). A closing commentary on the relationship between anxiety and environmental scenes is the effects of "external" events on inner feelings. People can "control" their feelings in "all [the] ways in which we attempt to control our inner reality by trying to control the external world" (Minsky, 1996, p.7). Rosalind Minsky focuses on the external motivation of anxiety, while Freud accredits anxiety to an undesirable image: "Anxiety is not newly created in repression; it is reproduced as an affective state in accordance with an already existing mnemonic image" (Smith, 2007, 4254). The external effects of anxiety, in turn, result in traumatic effects which "make the most powerful contributions to the stamping of character in the individual" (Bernstein, 1998, p.41). In *The Dumb House*, the protagonist's anxiety development first appeared out of environmental memory and the Dumb House's surroundings. They are the factual external motivations of his anxiety. He longs for his perfect life in the past, and he associates nature with every past moment: "There was even a bed of nettles against a fence; the only sign that this piece of land had once been a garden was the odd clump of pinks, or mildewed rose, struggling to exist amongst the weeds" (p.33). The protagonist also intensifies his mediation of a perfect past through nature, "The sun hadn't risen high enough over the roofs to penetrate this far and, even it had, the air here was dark and heavy and it was probably never dry at the far end, where it had once been planted with shade-loving plants, aucuba and holly and elaeagnus. I felt that, if I walked to the end of the path..." (pp.48–49). In this way, trees and plants are natural constituents of his desire for stability, as in the past.

He adds the Dumb House's garden to his admired natural scenes: "The garden lay still and silent under a thick blanket of early snow, and the waiting made it worse, but nobody came and I was left alone" (p.67). However, he becomes anxious when he recognizes his dark presence in the Dumb House: "Now the room was darker; perhaps it was this dimming of the light that effected the change, but from that day on, she began to slide, losing touch with me, drifting in and out of something that resembled sleep, but was heavier and less permeable" (p.74). In *A Cognitive Therapy of Anxiety Disorders*, David Clark and Aaron Beck (2010) argue that "in the majority of cases anxiety develops within the context of the fluctuating pressures, demands, and stresses of daily living" (p.4). Although anxiety produces disorder, it forces people to be more independent. Clark and Beck also argue that anxiety feelings evolve "in support of their contention of the independence of the fear module from the influence of conscious cognition" (p.25). However, anxiety can be alleviated by new responses through which "ineffective coping responses to fear have developed and have been maintained through the process of negative reinforcement" (Rygh and Sanderson, 2004, p.19).

In *The Dumb House*, the protagonist's responses are all directed towards nature. He sometimes enjoys listening to animals in the nearby forest: "I registered every draught of air, every change in temperature. I could feel the deer moving in the wood, or drifting along the hedges; I heard dogs and foxes barking from miles away" (p.81). At other times he walks throughout natural places. He goes sauntering in the forest to become less "anxious" and forget his tragic life in the Dumb House, "I think I had been walking for a long time when the dream began, content at first, then – quite suddenly – a little anxious, or perhaps concerned, not unhappy, not afraid, nothing so extreme" (p.93). But it is inevitable that he goes out to find nature, which resembles his mother's tenderness: "I was walking slowly, enjoying the near-silence, the smell of the cow parsley, the cooling air. I felt calm and I had the sense of going to meet someone, keeping a long-planned appointment, somewhere further along the track" (p.93). Here, he feels that he meets some fantastic thing. This thing is environmental nature. He feels that he misses a certain valuable thing. But he ultimately "realizes" that it is nature and its constituents, like birds: "After a time, I realized that what had disturbed me was the absence of birdsong, at that time of day when the birds should have been loudest, and I tried to remember whether I had heard them before, when I first set out. I thought I had, but I could not be sure; at the same time, the path widened and let me into a wide meadow" (p.93). Thus, he feels that nature is the supreme exit for his condensed anxiety, caused by a disturbing social problem, i.e. child exploitation.

## V. Conclusion

In this chapter I first studied the theme of child exploitation in Burnside's *The Dumb House*. I have conducted an analysis of the main character's, the protagonist's, transformation from being benign into being alienated and anxious. The protagonist yearns for his childhood life, but he does not obtain it, as he is dedicated to performing a medical experiment. He becomes merciless and tortures his own children. His transformation accumulates in the form of anxiety and how it destroys his psyche and moral compass. Then, I examined Garrard's concept of dwelling, which plays a vital role in highlighting the development of anxiety in the protagonist's psyche. My study approached the protagonist's loss of human sensation as he became crueller due to his medical experimentation on innocent children. The concept of dwelling has been used in relation to human phenomenological aspects, such as morality, life and death, ancestry and the like. These aspects define the sense of ecological setting in *The Dumb House* and its effects by analyzing the natural setting exemplified in its environmental surroundings. These surroundings include forests, meadow, gardens, hills and so on.

The use of dwelling has been connected to anxiety as an interdisciplinary study of eco-criticism and psychoanalysis. Glotfelty's concept of ecoconsciousness is the interdisciplinary connection between dwelling and anxiety. It links anxiety as a psychoanalytical concept in the analysis of the protagonist's agitated character. The analysis depends on Freud's concept of anxiety. In the final sense, anxiety is a result of an inner transformation in the protagonist's manners and behaviours. These behaviours change the morality and human mannerisms of the protagonist in a new atmosphere. Ultimately, the protagonist's behavioural crisis has been studied in the light of his dedication to natural and environmental scenes. He leaves the Dumb House intermittently to rid himself of his anxiety. He becomes divided between his new agitated feelings and perfect past manners and domestic life. He finds nature is a mature exit for his anxiety. In doing so, he can achieve relaxation and enjoyment to great extent.

Hence, environmental nature is studied as an escape from accumulated psychological symptoms developing out of a social problem which is the exploitation of children via medical experimentation.

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