

UNFOLDING THE OBSCURE IMAGE OF BEN IN DORIS LESSING'S *BEN, IN THE WORLD* (2000)

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Abstract

This paper studies the unusual character of Ben, who seems not to be adequately understood and is exaggeratedly foregrounded as somebody except a normal human being. In order to reach a more comprehensive picture of Ben, we examine different characters' mental functioning, narrative lines, points of view, and voices, especially Ben's, the story's protagonist, through the lens of narratology and focalization. Furthermore, Ben's clauses are analyzed in more detail through the technique of free indirect thought (FIT) to learn more about Ben's mental functioning, his consciousness, and the interactions between him and the world around him. Finally, we show that different narrations portray Ben as having a simple, child-like, animal-like, and deviant mind style or as too passive to alter his situation, but the analysis of his narration shows something different, and it seems that he is not understood adequately by other characters.

Keywords: narration; focalization; free indirect thought; Ben, in the World

Introduction

Ben, in the novel *Ben in the World* (2000), is an embodiment of human misery and his attempts to find meaning and reason for existence in a world of disconnectedness and detachment, a world that slowly diminishes and cruelly demolishes those who are different from others. Ben has been the subject of many scholarly works, and each has scrutinized the character from a specific point of view; for example, Sundberg (2011) argues that in the light of Freud's theories regarding the acquisition of gender roles, this novel represents the prejudice of people against others who do not fit the standard structure of the society and Islam (2013), to some extent, also believes in this perspective by claiming that Ben is a vulnerable, unknown, marginalized other who occupies the fictional space of resistance, a viewpoint which is also in line with our analysis in this study. On the other hand, Sullivan and Greenberg (2011) have a darker view of Ben and assert that he is a monstrous child and a disturbing source of terror by taking Terror Management Theory and Kristeva's theory of abjection into consideration, on the contrary, Gin (2009) believes that Ben is not a monster but a product of his parents' treatment.

This paper attempts to explore more details about Ben's character by scrutinizing different characters' narrative lines and points of view and comparing and contrasting these views with Ben's narration. It seems that there are some hidden but distinct features of Ben's character which have not been explored deeply. For instance, it appears that Ben is a character with cognitive impairment and communication disorder which, to some extent, is contrary to the labels given to him such as an animal, a child, a monster, a fool, or a primitive man. This study seeks to explore the non-standard forms in Ben's cognitive functioning through narratology, focalization, and the technique of free indirect discourse. The study traces the clues used in the novel's content and the narrative lines to show that Ben is an extraordinary and odd character with cognitive abilities.

Narratology and Focalization

One way to convey the speech and thoughts of characters and their conflicts in a story is through narrative techniques and shifting in the customary

narration of the events. Narratology is a field of study that consists of various narratological theories, approaches and attempts to analyze the events that happen in images, and spectacles of cultural artifacts that tell a story. Narratology helps the reader perceive, evaluate and analyze the narrative text.

In narratology, we study the narrative and elements related to it as a genre, and it aims to describe constants, combinations, and the variables that are used a lot in the narrative. In addition, it clarifies how these characteristics are connected within the theoretical models and the framework that these typologies have (Fludernik, 2009, p. 8). Palmer (2003) notes that narrative fiction is the representation of the fictional characters' mental functioning. He asserts that theorists should clarify how different phenomena are studied and analyzed (p. 322). In other words, in Palmer's view, the representation of a character's mind is considered a crucial feature in the study of narrative fiction. Palmer (2003) believes that the notion of mind encompasses various aspects of our inner life, such as thinking, perceiving, and feeling (p. 322). In his view, by analyzing the functioning of the characters' minds, we can make sense of events and actions. Margolin (2003) also highlights a preference of literature for non-standard forms of cognitive functioning. These non-standard forms can contain marginal or deviant mind styles with failed standard patterns. He raises the question of which mental functioning patterns are usual and which are not. He discusses that in the study of fictional minds, the description of the character's mind and the description of how readers interpret literature, and how readers assign minds and mental lives to characters are all applied (p. 271).

The story might be narrated by the narrator, but not necessarily from his point of view (Rimmon-Kenan, 2005, p. 73), as is the case in this story. In other words, the reader encounters a form of heteroglossia. The events of the story are told from a certain point of view and angle. In analyzing a narrative text, it is crucial to notice how the objects are perceived. Focalization –synonymous with narrative perspective, vision, and point of view – is an element of narrative study and can be traced back to the nineteenth century. According to Bal (2017), focalization is related to the relationship between the vision, the agent who sees, and the object or event, which is seen, and follows this formula: "A says that B sees what C is doing" (p. 135). A, B, or C can be the same person, which leads to different narrations.

Genette (1972) discusses the three forms of focalization and the distinction between heterodiegetic and homodiegetic narrators. These three levels are 1) zero focalization, 2) internal focalization, and 3) external focalization. In a zero focalization or non-focalized narrative, the narrator knows more than the characters or, more precisely, says more than any of the characters. There is also an omniscient narrator who has a predominant perspective. Internal focalization occurs when the narration is perceived by the focalizer, who is also the character (Bal, 2017, p. 136). In internal focalization, the narrator only says what a given character knows. "He belongs to the fictional world" (Herman & Vervaeck 2001, p. 71), and the elements are viewed from the participant(s) of the narration (Bal, 2017, p. 136). The narration is directed based on the perception of the narrated character and can be fixed, implying that the narration is from the point of view of a single character, known as the focal character. In multiple focalizations, the same event is viewed from the perspectives of several characters (Genette, 1972, pp. 189-194). Character focalization can vary in a narrative. It can change from one character to another (Bal, 2017, p. 136). When the focalizer and the character are the same, the focalizer has an advantage over the other characters. The reader watches with the character's eyes and will, in principle, be inclined to accept the vision presented by that character. Such a character-bound focalizer (CF) brings about bias and limitation. In external focalization, the narrator says more diminutive than the character knows. The narration does not have access to the characters' consciousness. He is near the narrating agent and is called the narrator focalizer (Bal, 2017, p. 136). External focalization (EF) happens when an anonymous agent, not a character in the narration, acts as the focalizer (Bal, 2017, p. 136).

Genette (1972) distinguishes narrators based on their participation in the narrated events (p. 248). This distinction is known as character-bound narrator and external narrator, respectively (Bal, 2017, p. 13). The character-bound narrator is a narrator who talks about himself/herself, and such a narrator is usually personified. An external narrator is one who talks about others; as Bal says, "the rhetoric of an external narrator can be used to present a story about others as true" (Bal, 2017, p. 14). However, sometimes the narrator says something opposite to what he said before on different occasions or weakens the truth of his comments, observations, or

reflections by doubting himself and causing the reader's suspicion (Herman & Vervaeck, 2001, p. 88). On the other hand, Rimmon-Kenan (2005) discusses the narrator and the unreliability of narration caused by reasons, such as limited knowledge, personal involvement, or personal participation, and the value scheme, which are problematic and puzzling, and also, the difficulty in deciding whether the narrator is reliable or unreliable in a text and if it is unreliable to what extent it is so. He also mentions that some narratives are so ambiguous that we cannot easily decide whether they are reliable (p. 106).

Genette (1980) introduces homodiegetic and heterodiegetic narrators within a narrative: "a homodiegetic narrator is an internal participant in the story he/ she is narrating, while a heterodiegetic narrator is external to the narrative action" (pp. 188–192). For example, the narrator in *Ben, in the World* (2000) is identified as heterodiegetic because he/she is external to the narrative actions. Narrators within a narrative text are divided into three types according to the person: the first-person narrator, the second-person narrator, which is seldom used in narrative texts, and the third-person narrator, which can be third-person limited, objective, or omniscient. Moreover, the third-person narrative has three categories: 1) omniscient narrator, 2) objective narrator, and 3) limited omniscient narrator.

In an objective narrative, the narrator stays out of the character's mind and tells the story from an objective and distant point of view. The narrator is merely an observer or a reporter of the event and cannot enter the other characters' minds; unless in some specific situations. The focus of a limited omniscient narrator is on the experience of an individual character. The story's events are limited to one character's point of view, and whatever happens in the story is related to what that character feels, sees, thinks, or hears. This narrative has some advantages over the first-person narrator. In the first-person narrative, what embellishes the story is the speech, action, and personality of the story's character. The first-person narrator's mistakes or lack of knowledge may influence the narrative and limits the narrator's awareness of the significance of the events. This narrative is more flexible than the other narratives. Both narratives take the reader to the character's mind, but the first-person narrative may be subjective and

naïve, or the narrator may deceive herself/ himself in some instances. An omniscient narrator is an all-knowing narrator who has comprehensive knowledge about everything and everybody: the past, present, and future of the characters and what has happened, is happening, or will happen, and the narrator can move from one character to another. This narrative can subjectively convey or show his/ her attitudes and opinions.

For the first time, Seymour Chatman, in *Story and Discourse* (1980), notes the idea of the overt and covert narrator. An overt narrator has a solid subjective consciousness, can be a character within the story or a character who intrudes the story from the outside and directly or indirectly addresses the reader, usually in the first person, and is an obvious narrator whom we can easily distinguish. In the covert narrator, the narrator is concealed, but the reader can hear the narrator's voice, yet there is no sign of the one who speaks. This narrator does not interfere with the events but has its logic and develops it. The concealed or covert narrator does not show his/ her attitude and attempts not to contact the reader or tries not to affect the reader's judgment of the characters and events of the story (Zhao, 2012, p. 2).

Booth (1983) discusses the reliable and unreliable narrator. The reliable narrator is the one who speaks or acts according to the norms of an implied author, while the unreliable narrator does not (p. 159). The implied author may have some differences from the actual author who created the text, and this difference can be about referring to the author's image made by the reader from the text. The implied author is considered the second self of the author and may have some connection with the actual author. The significant point about the narrator's reliability is the investigation of whether the reliable narrator's norms are following the implied author's norms or not. Unreliability does not mean that the narrator is not sincere or does not tell the truth when he describes the characters or events; it means that the narrator is alienated from the implied author because of his prejudice against the characters or the story's events for various reasons. The unreliable author may be morally, intellectually, and physically far from the implied author; in contrast, the reliable narrator acts as a leader who leads the reader throughout the story. The reliable narrator usually represents the norms of the implied author.

To explore Ben's and other people's narrations in the story, we take advantage of notions already discussed in this section, such as Genette's (1972), Bal's (2017), Palmer's (2004), etc to unfold Ben's characterization and point of view. In the following section, we present various examples from different characters' narrative lines and also the omniscient narrator's, to compare and contrast their narration with Ben's. Furthermore, for further analysis, extracts from Ben's narration are brought to examine Ben's characterization through the technique of free indirect discourse discussed by Rimmon-Kenan (2003) to achieve a better picture of this character.

Delving into Ben's Character through Narratology and Focalization

Ben, in the World, the sequel of the novel *The Fifth Child* (1988) written by the Nobel Prize winner Doris Lessing in 2000, is considered a controversial novel by various critics from different perspectives ranging from sociopolitical viewpoints to psychological matters. The story begins with 18-year-old Ben, totally abandoned by his family. He encounters the actual world and strives to survive in it. Throughout the novel, Ben deals with all kinds of suffering, betrayal, disloyalty, dishonesty, terror, and abuse by nearly everyone he knows. The villain and monstrous boy in *The Fifth Child* turns out to be a helpless lonely human-animal in *Ben, in the World*. All the hardships, betrayals, and feelings of loneliness lead to his suicide at the end of the story.

Ben in the World (2000) is considered a postmodern gothic novel and a mixture of several subgenres such as urban gothic, picaresque, and science fiction (Kuo, 2014, p. 2), narrated by an omniscient, all-knowing, third-person narrator. Nevertheless, the narration is not dedicated to Ben only; the narrator also narrates other characters' intentions and interactions. In this section, we attempt to explore Ben's characterization through narrativity and focalization.

The type of focalization in this story is zero focalization or non-focalized narrative in which the narrator knows more than the story's characters. In other words, the story has one zero-focalizer and an omniscient narrator who has a predominant perspective and thorough knowledge about all that is in the mind of the characters and their past, present, and future,

even their concerns, imaginations, doubts, or intentions. In the following sections, we attempt to study each character's narrative line and find out their opinion on Ben and see how Ben is seen or judged by others. Then we compare and contrast these statements with Ben's narrative section. In the following sections, different examples are brought to show the presence of the omniscient narrator in the mind of each character.

The narrator in *Ben in the World* is overt because he often indirectly addresses the reader while, at the same time, he stands outside the story and is detached from the events. The reader can notice the narrator's existence in the events he describes. The narrator not only gives the readers facts about the story but also states his attitude and opinion. As in the following example, the narrator's attitude and certainty about knowing all about what is in the mind of the character are demonstrated; for example, the narrator uses words such as "surely" to emphasize that he has comprehensive knowledge about everything within the story:

1) So, he took the old, old road to London, rich London, where surely there must be a little something for him too [...]. (Lessing, 2000, p. 15)

According to what we discussed previously, the exaggerated omniscient narrator is unreliable. The reason is that despite never judging the characters, it seems that sometimes the narrator is biased or prejudiced, e.g., apparently, the narrator seems to have a positive attitude towards the women in the story and depicts them as Ben's supporters. Meanwhile, the men of the story are described as either abusive or untrustworthy. On the other hand, in line with other characters, the narrator insists on describing Ben as an animal, a child, a stupid, or anything except a human being. The narrator attempts to attract the readers' sympathy but never tells them why Ben is like this or the reason behind this deficiency. To sum up, the narrator in *Ben in the World* is omniscient (all-knowing), heterodiegetic/non-character, overt, and unreliable. We already explored who says; now we want to explore who sees through focalization.

The following two examples demonstrate different characters' ontological questions about what Ben is (not who he is, because they consider Ben

an animal or anything except a human being). Each tries to define him as something, but they fail:

2) Alex was saying quietly to himself that Ben was not human, even if most of the time he behaved like one. And he was not an animal. He was a throwback of some kind. (Lessing, 2000, p. 44)

In the preceding example, the narrator enters the mind of Alex and narrates his concern about what (not who) Ben is. He thinks Ben is neither a human nor an animal. Finally, he concludes that he must be "a throwback of some kind," or whatever Ben is, he does not know or does not care.

3) [the narrator goes into Mrs. Biggs's mind] It is not my business — what he is, sums up what she felt. Deep waters! Trouble! Keep out! (Lessing, 2000, p. 4)

As the excerpt shows, the omniscient narrator enters Mrs. Biggs's mind and narrates her soliloquy and what she feels. She is also thinking about what Ben is but tries to distract herself from this thought by thinking that whoever or whatever this creature is, he must be dangerous, and she should keep her distance.

In the succeeding example, the narrator enters Rita's mind and narrates her anger over Johnston for sending Ben off because Johnston was somehow jealous of Ben and thought that Ben's odd appearance would attract the police's attention. But Rita reminds Johnston of their deal and wants him to keep his distance from Ben. Rita is one of the mother figures who supports Ben in the story:

4) Rita had been angry with Johnston for sending Ben off. She had reminded him that they agreed that she would please herself with her customers. (Lessing, 2000, p. 22)

Then, the narrator goes into Johnston's mind and narrates his intention of abusing Ben to smuggle drugs and sees Ben as an object or a tool that can make him rich:

5) Johnston did not interfere again, but he was waiting for some opportunity he could turn to his advantage. (Lessing, 2000, p. 23)

After that, the narrator enters Teresa's mind and narrates her flashback to her hard times and miseries in the past when she had no other way but to be a prostitute to support her impoverished family in the favela, which was a run-down area:

6) Teresa knew she could not take that dress into the favela: her mother would have it off her, to sell for food. And Teresa privately agreed that her mother would be right. (Lessing, 2000, p. 58)

Then, the narrator enters Alfredo's mind. He has lied to Ben by saying he saw his tribe somewhere in the mountain many years ago and that he could take him there (so Ben would accept going to the laboratory):

7) And now, this was the moment when Alfredo should come out with the truth, which would put an end to this joy. He simply could not do it (Lessing, 2000, p. 68).

Then, the narrator passes into Alfredo's mind. He has lied to Ben by saying he saw his tribe somewhere in the mountain many years ago and that he could take him there (so Ben would accept going to the laboratory). This fake story causes Ben's happiness for a short time by thinking that he is not alone in this world and there are people like him somewhere, that he can live with them and even find a mate. Before this saying, Ben's main concern was coming back home, somewhere which does not really exist. The following extracts are taken from Ben's narration and his attempt to get back to his home in England: "When can I go back home?" (Lessing, 2000, p. 36), "And when are we going home?" (Lessing, 2000, p. 38), "Perhaps I am going home? he thought" (Lessing, 2000, p. 45), "I want to go home, he was repeating, silently, in his head. Home, home" (Lessing, 2000, p. 50).

However, after what Alfredo told him about his people, as the following example demonstrates: "I've seen people like you, said Alfredo" (Lessing, 2000, p. 68); Ben's main concern becomes seeing his people, so he repeatedly (like a child) mentions it or asks where or when they will take him there: "Like me? People like me?" (Lessing, 2000, p. 68), "People like me. Ben was chanting. Like me, people like Ben. And he interrupted his dance to ask, just like me? [...] Will you take me to them?" (Lessing, 2000, p. 68), "Ben

believed that Alfredo knew where Ben's people were" (Lessing, 2000, p. 77). Furthermore, besides the sentences' simple syntax which is foregrounded in the novel, in all these examples, consistent matters are repeated: "home" and "Ben's people." In other words, Ben is described as a stubborn child or a simple-minded character with limited cognitive abilities whose only concerns are either going back home or visiting his people. Moreover, it seems that the narrator insists on depicting Ben as an extraordinary creature who is more animal than human. When the shifts of narrative lines occur, nearly all other characters, such as Mrs. Biggs, Rita, Teresa, Alex, Alfredo, and Richard, see Ben as an animal, a child who needs help and support, or a stupid person easily tricked and abused. Ben is constantly humiliated and verbally attacked with labels such as "dog," "not human," "a wild man," "child," "slow stupid oaf," "yeti," "beast," "stupid," etc. (Lessing, 2000, pp. 6-77) which reinforces Islam's (2013) perspective, "Ben is a vulnerable and marginalized other" (p. 279). In other words, who we are dealing with in the novel, is an outsider and a physically and mentally distinct person who is harshly judged and debased by others and will never be considered a human being. The following examples indicate Ben's abnormality in the eyes of other characters. Nearly all of them agree on Ben's difference and try to assign something to him to conclude who or what this creature is:

Ben as an Animal

The other characteristic constantly mentioned in the text is Ben's animality. The following extracts relate to Mrs. Biggs' points of view and clues which depict Ben as an animal. She considers Ben a "dog" for acting like one: his laugh is like a dog's bark, and his voraciousness for eating cold meat is not what a normal human being does. Furthermore, even she imagines his possible animalistic dreams and concludes whatever Ben is, "he is not one of us."

1. He sat there like a dog expecting a rebuke, his teeth revealed in that other grin, which she knew and understood now, a stretched, a teeth-showing grin that meant fear. (Lessing, 2000, p. 4)
2. She [Mrs. Biggs] enjoyed hearing him laugh: it was like a bark. Long ago, she had a dog who barked like that. (Lessing, 2000, p. 5)

3. [...] She knew he was not human: “not one of us” as she put it. Perhaps he was a kind of yeti. (Lessing, 2000, p. 7)
4. It was how a dog lays itself down, close, for company, and her [Mrs. Biggs] heart ached, knowing his loneliness. (Lessing, 2000, p. 7)
5. She thought he was like an intelligent dog, always trying to anticipate wants and commands. Not like a cat at all: that was a different kind of sensitivity. Moreover, he was not like a monkey, for he was slow and heavy. (Lessing, 2000, p. 7)

The following three extracts are from Mary Grindly's narration. She thinks Ben is not like humans and looks more like a beast or a yeti who eats the raw flesh of animals, but since he works well, it does not matter “what” he is, and she does not bother to know either.

6. Mary said to Matthew, “Take that beast to market and get what you can for it” (Lessing, 2000, p. 9).
7. A kind of yeti he looked like, but he did the work well enough (Lessing, 2000, p. 9).

The other significant and dominant point of view in the novel is the zero-focalizer's. The examples below are from the omniscient narrator (also the zero-focalizer), who also focuses (with partiality) on Ben's animal-like personality and calls him “a poor beast.” The zero-focalizer emphasizes that Ben has strong animal-like instincts which act as an alarm in dangerous situations or show him the path like a map. Significantly, the third extract, which is related to the scene Ben hunts the pigeon on the balcony and eats the raw flesh of the bird while blood is dripping from his mouth and the bird's feathers are scattered around, is considered the acme of Ben's description as a human-animal.

8. Ben was going to say something about the money owed to him, but his instincts shouted at him; danger — and he ran away. (Lessing, 2000, p. 11)
9. On he went, following instincts that worked well if he did not confuse them with maps and directions. (Lessing, 2000, p. 11)

10. Ben had leaped out, and the bird was in his hand. He was tearing off feathers when he heard the cat's sound [...]. Ben ripped some flesh off the bird and flung it down. The cat crept out and ate. The blood was dripping from their mouths [...]. The cat went back in. So did Ben. It was not enough, those few mouthfuls of flesh, but it was something, his stomach was appeased. (Lessing, 2000, p. 12)
11. It was a need for meat, and he smelled the rawness of blood, the reek of it. (Lessing, 2000, p. 15)
12. Once he had grabbed up a handful of chops and stood gnawing them, the butcher's back being turned, and then the sounds of crunching had made the man whip around. (Lessing, 2000, p. 15)

The common point in the above and following extracts related to the omniscient narrator is that he/ she without mentioning why and how Ben is different, unanimous with other characters, says that Ben is not a human being and cunningly eludes the explanations necessary for understanding Ben. Even in some parts directly says that he/ she does not know the reason which is contradictory to being an omniscient narrator and casts doubt on the reliability of this narrator. In other words, the narrator is fluctuating between reliability and unreliability, and omniscience and limitation. But since the reliability or the omniscience is more dominant, we are compelled to choose them as the main features of the narrator.

Rita

The other female character who is mentioned as Ben's guardian and supporter is Rita. The following extracts focus on Rita's description of Ben. She thinks whatever Ben is, he must not be a human; but then, she ironically concludes we are all animals to some extent. She calls him a “human-animal,” “a hairy ape,” “a dog,” or “a chimpanzee.” The difference between her narration with others is that she was too close to Ben, and they had some intercourses; she supported him, was kind to him, and somehow liked him the way he was, i.e., his animal-like way:

1. He had his teeth in her neck, and as he came, he let out a grunting bark, like nothing she had ever heard before. (Lessing, 2000, p. 20)

2. She had tried to change him saying, “But Ben, let us try it this way, turn around, it’s not nice what you do, it is like animals.” (Lessing, 2000, p. 21)
3. She had told him it had not been like being with a man, more like an animal. “You know, like dogs.” (Lessing, 2000, p. 21)
4. A human-animal, she concluded, and then joked with herself, well, aren’t we all? (Lessing, 2000, p. 23)

Richard

Richard (a minor character) is the only male character who (somehow) likes and helps Ben. Although he thinks Ben is extraordinary (as the extract below demonstrates), he cares for him, never deceives or lies to him, and acts like a friend. Anyhow, in the end, like others, he betrays him by leaving him alone in the French hotel. The extract below is Richard’s interior monologue, and the technique used for his narration is Free indirect thought.

What did Johnston think he was doing, letting this loon, this simpleton, loose in the world? (Lessing, 2000, p. 41)

Alex

Alex, another abusive male character along with Johnson, Richard, and Alfred, is a middle-aged filmmaker who accidentally sees Ben in a hotel in France and is attracted to his odd appearance and starts imagining making a film based on him and his primitive people. When he asks the receptionists about Ben, they say he is a film star from Scotland; enough for Alex to plan to take Ben to Rio and make his film. During this trip, he wondered what kind of creature Ben was. He acts like a human who cares about his appearance (the second example), but he looks like an animal (“dwarfs? Yetis?” “beasts,” “cat,” “animal”), reinforcing others’ claims about Ben’s character. Besides, All the following extracts, which are related to Alex’s different points of view, are examples of free indirect thought:

1. This band of what — dwarfs? Yetis? (Lessing, 2000, p. 46)
2. He was possessed by those creatures — who? — what? — not beasts, for Ben, inhabited the forms of everyday life, used a knife

and fork, went every day to have his beard clipped and his hair done, changed his clothes — which were beginning to look a little shabby. (Lessing, 2000, p. 43)

3. Ben was moving about this room like an animal taking the measure of a new place, trying the bathroom — the shower, the lavatory — opening and shutting cupboards and drawers. (Lessing, 2000, p. 47)

Inez

Inez is the only antagonistic female character in the story. She is the affluent and opportunist friend of Teresa who reports Ben’s existence to her superiors. Mercilessly, she considers Ben an animal (“yeti”), a primitive, lesser than a human, or a throwback who cannot think or know what is good or bad for him. She supposes that analyzing the different features of Ben can help science answer the unanswered questions about the human being and his ancestors:

- 1) She told him about Ben, describing him as a yeti. “Something like that, at any rate,” but no one could say what he was. “He is a throwback,” she said. “At least, that is what I think. You ought to have a look at him.” (Lessing, 2000, p. 65)
- 2) She had no feeling for him, did not even think of him as a person — away from the institute at some point, and then he would disappear. (Lessing, 2000, p. 76)

Teresa

Teresa, another female guardian of Ben in the story, also thinks Ben does not look like a human being, but despite knowing this fact, she tries to defend him in front of those who attempt to harm or abuse him. She thinks Ben looks more like a child who needs care.

- 1) Inez was expecting him to pee in front of them all — like an animal, Teresa thought — but Ben took the flask and looked about him for cover. “A screen,” ordered Inez. (Lessing, 2000, p. 71)
- 2) “And you put Ben into a cage like an animal, without clothes”

[Teresa told the American professor]. (Lessing, 2000, p. 82)

Ben as a Child

Nearly all characters in the story think Ben, despite his old-looking appearance, is immature and child-like. For instance, the following two examples relate to when Rita was trying to find a job for Ben; she thought Ben could work as one of Johnson's drivers, but Johnson warns her about Ben being a mentally-retarded child, but she insists on helping him anyhow. When Ben sits in the car, since he does not know how to drive, he mimics driving by moving the steering wheel and making sounds like "brrrr" (the Onomatopoeia for the sound of a car), just like a child. When Rita sees this scene, she is convinced that Ben, despite his appearance, is not more than a child.

1) Poor Ben, he is like a three-year-old, and somewhere she had been foolishly believing that he could learn this job. (Lessing, 2000, p. 26)

2) he was making a noise like Brrrr, Brrrr, and laughing. (Lessing, 2000, p. 26)

Example 3, which is from Richard's point of view as the focalizer, relates to when Ben wears sunglasses for the first time and sees his reflection in a mirror; he thinks his eyes have disappeared (like a child), so he panics and takes off the glasses quickly. Moreover, this example not only emphasizes Ben's childishness but also represents his lack of schema for sunglasses.

3) They walked towards their reflections in a shop window, he stopped, bent forward, looking at himself. "No eyes," he said, in explanation. "No eyes. My eyes have gone." And he panicked, taking off his glasses (Lessing, 2000, p. 37)

In example 4, which is also from Richard's point of view, Ben asks questions like a curious child who has seen a ship for the first time and it is interesting for him to know where it goes; Richard also answers him in a simple way, as if he is trying to explain something to a child.

4) He said to Richard, "Where do they go?" "Who?" "Those ships?" "Oh, everywhere. All over the world, Ben." (Lessing, 2000, p. 37)

The next example relates to the time Ben is informed about people like himself. Teresa, as the focalizer, sees how Ben, like an obsessed child, childishly asks where exactly his people are; and when they will take him there. Moreover, the childish phrases uttered by Ben also denote that Ben has a simple mind style.

5) "Like me? People like me?" [...] "People like me," Ben was chanting, "Like me, people like Ben." And he interrupted his dance to ask, "Just like me?" (Lessing, 2000, p. 68)

The following examples, from different points of view, also directly mention Ben as a child:

6) Alex took him to a cinema, a film carefully chosen, as for a child, a good strong story, excitement, danger. (Lessing, 2000, p. 44)

7) He [Alex] was thinking, this is like looking after a child. (Lessing, 2000, p. 46)

8) She felt that hairy face on her bare upper chest and knew that this was a child she was holding, or at least a child's misery. (Lessing, 2000, p. 53)

8) People treated him as if he were younger than that, and he behaved like an obedient child, she thought. (Lessing, 2000, p. 61)

Ben as a Strange Character

Many characters describe Ben as a strange creature. The following examples demonstrate Ben's strangeness and otherness from different characters' points of view, narrated by the omniscient narrator, all of which highlight Ben's odd and extraordinary character and depict him as an outsider:

The people he belonged to, whoever they were, matured early, in which case they would die young, according to our ideas. Middle-aged at twenty, and

old at forty [...] She knew he was not human: “not one of us” as she put it. (Lessing, 2000, p.7)

Mrs. Biggs (example 1) thinks Ben must be another kind of human being whose process of growing up differs from an ordinary human (“one of us”). Furthermore, even though Ben constantly mentions that he is eighteen, his appearance shows a mature man.

In example 2, Rita sees Ben naked for the first time, and after seeing his odd appearance and actions, she concludes that Ben is not a human or at least not like the kinds she has seen before (“a human-animal”).

He was outside anything she had been told about, seen on the television, or knew from experience. When she saw him naked for the first time, she thought, Wow! That is not human [...], yet if he was not human, what was he? A human-animal, she concluded. (Lessing, 2000, p.7)

The following examples also highlight Ben’s oddness. Ben is considered a scientific case by Inez: “introducing this creature who was a kind of scientific enigma, to someone who could solve it” (Lessing, 2000, p. 66); or “a polite sort of creature,” not a human: “This yeti, this freak, was a polite sort of creature, almost like ordinary people” (Lessing, 2000, p. 76); or “a throwback,” someone who belongs to thousands of years ago: “They [the scientists] say he must be a throwback to — a long time ago. A long time. Thousands of years. They can find out from him what those old people were like” (Lessing, 2000, p. 76).

As stated before, what is significant about this novel’s narration is that, apart from Ben’s narration, the story consists of multiple narrative lines and points of view, which are embedded and hard to discern. Even sometimes, three narrative lines are intermingled into one, like the following example in which the narrative lines of Teresa, Alfredo, and Alfredo’s friend are mixed, while the omniscient narrator is simultaneously in the mind of all three characters who are thinking of the place Ben might be, “Where was Ben? They stood at the edge of the trees, looking at the scattered buildings and did not know where to go” (Lessing, 2000, p. 78). Besides, the extract is an example of free indirect thought that we will discuss more thoroughly

in the next section. Such oscillations between different narrative lines may create bewilderment for the reader to understand who is narrating a specific section.

From the beginning till the end of the novel, Ben’s thought is undermined by an omniscient narrator who is also the zero-focalizer; everything and everyone within the story is seen through this focalizer’s eyes. In other words, our knowledge of each character’s point of view stems from the focalizer or the omniscient narrator. However, we should note that some contradictions exist in the picture given to us by the narrator. In parts of the story, the narrator describes Ben as an animal or a human-animal with animalistic desires or needs. For example, Ben’s extraordinary appetite, sex, hunting and eating raw animals, or strong senses of smell or hearing distinguish him from a normal human being. Ben, on the contrary, is depicted as an ordinary human being in other parts of the story. For example, he can think, remember, perceive, or understand what is happening around him; he cares about his appearance, shaves his beard or cuts or trims his hair like a man, wears clothes, or asks and answers questions. Nevertheless, Ben is usually too passive to stand against those trying to abuse him, i.e., Ben knows and understands that he has been tricked or deceived but does not or cannot prevent it. For example, he knows Alex has misused him, or Johnson has betrayed him, but he does nothing against them, just like a helpless child.

The following two examples indicate that Ben can think or perceive his surroundings and has the cognitive ability an animal cannot have:

He knew how hard it was for him to inhibit ordinary life [...] he wanted to get up and go, but knew he must not until the business was settled. (Lessing, 2000, p.25)

He was thinking of Richard: now it seemed to him that Richard had been a real friend and that he liked him. (Lessing, 2000, p. 48)

Ben is also depicted as a lonely character (pp. 6, 8, 13, 15, 19, 32, 40, 41, 43, 87), innocent, abused (pp. 43, 44, 46, 54, 95), unloved, poorly treated or rejected. It seems that the narrator tries to make the reader sympathize with Ben; choosing the technique of free indirect thought in which the narrator

and the character are close also highlights the close picture the narrator attempts to give and the sympathy he tries to draw. On the other hand, the focalizations demonstrate and picture the protagonist as an outsider.

Through investigating narrative lines related to Ben's relationship with women, one can conclude that, in most cases, he is searching for a mother-figure who can fill the place of his mother and take care of him or love him (an Oedipus Complex sort). Also, in some examples, the word "like" in Ben's discourse means sex, such as, "Rita liked me. She liked me. You do not like me" (Lessing, 2000, p. 88). This example relates to the scene Ben and Teresa were in the same room after their elopement from the laboratory. Ben thinks Teresa likes him and will give herself to him like Rita, but she does not, so he concludes that this means she does not like him. On the other hand, after what Ben was trying to do, Teresa does not shout or escape but tries to understand him and convinces herself by saying, "this ... man, whatever he was — strong and full of energy when he was not miserable — had his instincts" (Lessing, 2000, p. 88), while, at the same time, she believes he is not more than a child, "She heard his breathing: it was rather like a child's who is about to burst into tears" (Lessing, 2000, p. 88).

Exploring Ben's Free Indirect Thought

Free indirect thought is an approach that helps in understanding a person's mental functioning. Free indirect thought (FIT) not only represents an individual consciousness but also depicts the conflicts and interactions between the individual and the world around him. FIT is considered the ability to provide insight into the character's active mind. Free indirect discourse grammatically and mimetically intermediates between indirect and direct discourse (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p. 113). Golomb (1968) calls free indirect discourse "combined speech" because it consists of not only the co-presence of two voices but also that of the narrator's voice and a character's pre-verbal perception or feeling, and Bal (1981) uses the term "embedding" for FID, which operates between two utterances, two focalizations, or an utterance and a focalization (qt. in. Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p. 114).

FID is a toolkit to understand the main themes of a work. The FID hypothesis is often crucial to identify speakers and assign given speech features or attitudes to them, enabling the reader to make sense of deviant linguistic

practices, unacceptable attitudes, or even lies without undermining the credibility of the work or the implied author (Ron, 1981, pp. 28–9). FID boosts the bivocality or polyvocality of the text by drawing on the plurality of speakers and perspectives (McHale, 1978). Furthermore, this technique elaborates the problematic relationship between any utterance and its origin and is a helpful tool for illustrating indirect interior monologue or stream of consciousness.

The FID technique can help the reader reconstruct the implied author's attitude toward the character(s) involved in the story. Nevertheless, still, an ambiguous "double-edged effect" might be noted. On the one hand, the presence of a narrator as different from the character may create an ironic distancing. On the other hand, mingling the narrator's speech with the character's and his/ her experiences may raise an empathetic identification. This double-edged effect may cause ambiguity, where the reader has no means of choosing between the "ironic" and the "empathetic" attitude (Rimmon-Kenan, 1983, p. 117). In order to have a free indirect discourse, we should make some changes to the sentence:

1. The comma and the reporting verb "said" should be removed. So, the reported speech is no longer dependent on the reporting verb.
2. This dependence is marked by the introduction of the subordinating conjunction "that."
3. The first and second-person pronouns change into third-person.
4. The tense of the verb undergoes backshift; for example, the time adverb "tomorrow" becomes "the following day."
5. The close deictic, e.g., "here" changes to the distant deictic "there."
6. The verbs of movement alter from "towards" to "away from."

In the following section, we will analyze Ben's clauses through free indirect thought to learn more about him. The extract is an example of FID:

Ben found it hard to believe this was a plane: it was so big. He could hardly see how big. And he understood that he was not going home, but somewhere in that mind of his that was always wrestling with itself to remain in control, to understand, he was telling himself that

he had been promised he would go home, and that he had been betrayed and that Alex was part of this betrayal. Brazil. What was Brazil? Why did he have to go there? Why should he be in a film? (Lessing, 2000, p. 46)

The passage contains several classic markers of free indirect thought. The entry into Ben's consciousness is signaled by clues, such as stylistic modality ("He could hardly see how big," "Why should he be in a film?"), lexical items which suggest a subjective point of view ("Ben found it hard to believe this was a plane," and he understood that he was not going home," "somewhere in that mind of his that was always wrestling with itself to remain in control [...]"), questions which he is asking himself ("What was Brazil? Why did he have to go there? Why should he be in a film?"). Also, entering Ben's consciousness through FIT, is marked by "the characteristic combination," in Leech and Short's words, of "the presence of third-person pronouns and past tense, which corresponds with the form of narrative reports and shows indirectness, along with several features, both positive and negative, indicating freeness" (2007, p. 261) (see also Fludernik, 1993, pp. 72–109).

This extract also highlights that Ben is able to understand and perceive the world around him ("And he understood that he was not going home"), but what is significant is the following sentence, "somewhere in that mind of his that was always wrestling with itself;" as if somewhere in his mind, not Ben, is struggling with itself to remain in control or understand. It appears as if he is apart from that part of his mind, and it is a distinct person who has the authority to control. In other words, Ben is not the controller of his mind, but he is controlled by it. There are also many other examples in which a part of Ben's body, not Ben, is responsible for an action. For example, "His feet were taking him to — he stood outside the tall wire of a building site [...]" (Lessing, 2000, p.15), which seems Ben's feet are the agent who takes him everywhere, and he has no control over them.

Another point about Ben in this extract is that he understands what is done to him ("he was telling himself that he had been promised he would go home, and that he had been betrayed and that Alex was part of this betrayal"). Not only he is not a mentally retarded character like Benjy, or an idiot, "mad man" (Lessing, 2000, p. 8), "freak" (Lessing, 2000, p. 25), or

"an intelligent dog" (Lessing, 2000, p. 7), or an "animal" as others call him, but also he makes inductive reasoning. Ben perceives the cause-and-effect relationships, thinks and evaluates the situation, or even asks questions in his mind ("What was Brazil? Why did he have to go there? Why should he be in a film?"), but all in simple ways, indicating and foregrounding his simple mind, "Ben found it hard to believe this was a plane: it was so big." The final point is that Ben is a passive character who cannot do much to change his situation; in other words, he is dependent on others' help to do something [e.g., going back home].

Conclusion

Lessing's postmodern novel *Ben in the World* is a depiction of how difference in society is rejected and easily dissolved. As we expect from a postmodern novel, there is no central and defined and fixed standpoint to rely on, even deciding on its type of narration is a difficult job because the narration is constantly fluctuating or contradicting what one has discussed previously, highlighting its postmodernity. But this study, which has built its analysis on narratology, focalization, and free indirect discourse, attempted to excavate Ben's character once more by minute analysis of the other main characters' focalization and narrative lines and comparing and contrasting these lines with Ben's. The study reveals that Ben, as everyone says, might be a simple, child-like, animal-like, or strange character, who sees the world in a simple way, but he is not a mentally retarded character like Benjy in *The Sound and The Fury*; in other words, there is a gap between the way others see Ben and the way he sees the world and himself highlighted through his focalization. Despite different claims, Ben can think, remember, make simple inductive reasoning, and somehow understand the relationship between causes and effects, but he is too passive to change his situation. Ben does not seem to be a normative human nor an animal but a hybrid of both. He behaves like an animal, which represents his non-standard form of cognitive functioning and, at the same time, shows his thinking ability, reveals his human personality, and leaves the reader with an unanswered question about who he is or why he is like this. Narratology, which has played a pivotal role in the analysis of this study, could contribute to revealing some hidden points about Ben's character and society's prejudice against someone who

does not fit into a standard human category. Through focalization, we had the opportunity to evaluate the events from each character's eyes, and by comparing them with Ben's focalization, realize that this character is not understood properly by anyone in the story, even the omniscient narrator intentionally or unintentionally has failed to give a comprehensive image of this character and what we tried to do in this analysis was to fill this gap of comprehension in Ben's character through narratology.

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