



**Disattending Another's Complaints in Nick Witby's "The  
Complaint": A Pragmatic Study of Disaffiliation in  
Interaction**

**By**

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**Abstract:**

Complaining is a common human feeling. Most of us have gone through situations where we found ourselves in need of complaining. Heinman and Traverso (2009: 2383) stated that a complaint is “any type of comment with even the slightest negative valence”. People to whom complaints are offered perform one of two options: 1) attending the complaint of the other and thus showing affiliation in interaction with him; or 2) disattending it and hence showing disaffiliation in interaction. Complaints are not always against individuals. Sometimes, they are against Institutional Administrations in the Society. This later case is the subject of this research paper. Whenever people complain, they always expect their interlocutors to attend or take up their complaint and consequently mitigate it. But what happens if this complaint is disattended or not taken up. This research paper offers a study of disattending another’s complaints in Nick Witby’s *‘The Complaint’*. It deals with disaffiliation in interaction from a pragmatic point of view. It shows that disaffiliation results from various interactional processes, e.g. disattending complaints between the co-participants in interaction. It claims that disattending another’s complaint can be done through subtle or blatant disattending. It also shows that disaffiliation results from the face threatening acts of questioning and assessment. The research helps people to notice disaffiliation in interaction in order to remain on good terms with each other.

**Key Words:**

Complaints; subtle disattending of complaints; blatant disattending; pragmatic disaffiliation; second assessment; polar questions; echo questions; Nick Witby; and *‘the Complaint’*.

## مستخلص

اهمال شكاوى الاخر في مسرحيه "الشكوى" للكاتب نيك ويتبي:  
دراسه براجماتييه لعدم الانتماء في التفاعل

الشكوى شعور انساني عام فالعديد منا قد تعرض لمواقف وجد نفسه فيها في حاجه للشكوى. أوضح هينمان و ترافرسو أن الشكوى هي أي نوع من التعليق يشوبه أقل قدر من عدم التكافؤ. فالناس التي يشكو اليها الاخرين عليها ان تختار بين أمرين: (١) أن تهتم بشكوى الاخر وبذلك تبدي تعاطفها معه او (٢) الا تهتم بها و بذلك تعكس عدم تعاطفها مع الاخر اثناء التفاعل. والشكوى ليست دائما ضد الأفراد اذ انها أحيانا تكون ضد الادارات المؤسسيه في المجتمع وهذا الأخير هو ما يعرض له هذا البحث. فعندما يشكو الناس فانهم دائما يتوقعون ان يهتم بهم من يستمعون اليهم و بالتالي يقللون معاناتهم. ولكن ماذا يحدث اذا لم يهتم أحد بشكوى الأخر أو أهملها؟ لذلك فهذا البحث يدرس اهمال شكاوى الأخر في مسرحيه "الشكوى" للكاتب نيك ويتبي حيث يتناول من خلال دراسه براجماتييه الشعور بعدم الانتماء لدى الأفراد. يبين البحث أن الشعور بعدم الانتماء ينتج عند الآخر نتيجة عمليات تفاعليه مختلفه مثل اهمال شكاوى الأخرين اثناء التفاعل بين الأشخاص المتحدثين. ويوضح البحث أن اهمال شكوى الأخر ممكن أن يتم من خلال الاهمال الخفي و الاهمال الظاهر. كما يظهر أن عدم الانتماء ينتج من خلال التصرفات التي تريق ماء الوجه وهي الأسئلة والتقييم. وبهذا فالبحث يساعد الناس على ملاحظه عدم الانتماء في التفاعل حتى يصبحوا على علاقه طيبه مع بعضهم.

## كلمات مفتاحيه:

الشكوى- الاهمال الخفي للشكوى- الاهمال الظاهر للشكوى- عدم الانتماء من منظور براجماتي- التقييم للمره الثانيه- الأسئلة القطبيه- الأسئلة ذات الصدى- نيك ويتبي- ومسرحيه الشكوى.

## **1.Introduction:**

This research paper studies disattending another's complaints in Nick Witby's *The Complaint*. It inspects the relationship between disattending complaints and disaffiliation in interaction. In so doing, it handles affiliation in interaction from a pragmatic point of view. It shows that disaffiliation is an outcome of disattending complaints between the co-participants in interaction. It claims that disattending another's complaint can be done through subtle or blatant disattending. And it shows that disaffiliation results from the face threatening acts of questioning and assessment.

## **2.Nick Witby and *'The Complaint'*:**

Nick Witby (1963-) is a contemporary British dramatist. He wrote *'the Complaint'* in 2011 during the Arab Spring and the Greek crisis. He has been to Egypt before the revolution of January 25, 2011. He has lived in Cairo and has spent "many bewildering days in El Mogamma" (Witby, 2012). He has seen the Tahrir Square, the place where most of the incidents of the revolution took place. Witby's importance lies in the fact that he is one of those foreign writers who showed a vivid concern in Egypt and the reform winds in the Arab Spring.

*'The Complaint'* was presented on Hampstead Theatre Downstairs in London in 2012. The setting of the play is unknown. We do not know exactly where the incidents take place. But still there are some indications that it occurs in the Middle East. For sometimes we hear Al-Azan. Also one of the characters wears hijab. And the accent of another character is African, although he sometimes de-Africanizes it. The play is about the suffering of an individual in a bureaucratic absurd society. The play is written in the Kafkaesque way in the sense that everything is not as it looks. It is mainly based on contradictions. The play has only four characters. Afra, the protagonist, is a woman in her twenties. She submits an official complaint to an Administration in Society. There, she meets the other three characters: Mr Tabutanzer, Truman and Dawn Birdcatcher. They are the authorities responsible for the processing of her complaint. However, they never discuss the

content of her complaint. They are mainly concerned with its form and processing. As the play opens, we know that Afra submitted the complaints four months ago. Yet, she has not got any response. Seasons come and go and the complaint is still suspended. But Afra does not lose hope. She is totally convinced with her rights to see through her complaint. She lodges a second complaint; then she follows it with a third and then with a fourth one. Her persistence and determination put the authorities in an embarrassing situation with the young people outside who follow her on social media. The authorities interrogated her, constrained her hands, tortured her with the electric shocks of the polygraph, gaged her mouth, tied her in a chair and finally threatened her by pushing her chair towards the tip of the roof of the building. Yet, she never gave up.

Through Afra's interrogations, we knew that she was an activist who stood on the square on a plinth and walked in demonstrations several times. She became a very famous social figure to the extent that she became a trend on twitter. Many thousands of people called for her release. By the time the authorities were about to push her from the tip of the building, they heard the sounds of explosions and saw the smoke outside. So, they realized that the world was changing so fast and that the anger of the demonstrators outside was beyond their control. They felt that if they killed Afra, there would be many other Afras down in the street. For a while they thought of sacrificing one of them, Truman by tying him to Afra's chair and pushing them together from the roof of the building. Mr Tabutanzer suggested this satanic idea to soothe the demonstrators outside. He said: "What is conflict after all? What are wars? But a sacrifice – that, by letting of blood by both sides, cleanses the victor of guilt" (Witby, 2012: 48). But after negotiating, they cancelled the act. Finally, they decided to take Afra's part and to release her. They threw the portrait of President King over the edge of the roof. Thus, they announced to the demonstrators that they are on Afra's behalf. Simply, they reversed their position and got over the wave. They took the chance to benefit from the revolution. Mr Tabutanzer declared: "We must not run from the

wave that imperils us, but swim towards it and meet it out beyond the shallows before it rears to its deadly height! If we can do that, that is our moment to inherit the world. But to do it we must not look up, but DOWN! UPON THE PEOPLE! AS ONE!” (Witby, 2012: 52).

The play exhibited chaos and mess that spread during the revolutions of the Arab Spring. It showed that there were many profiteers who benefited from it, inside and outside the country. It displayed that it indirectly served the benefits of people other than those who initiated it inside the country. Also, it referred to the role Western Nations played during it, as they assigned themselves “Order Redeemers” (ibid: 51).

The importance of “*The Complaint*” is two-fold. First, it is the first play written by a British dramatist, and not an Arab or an Anglo-Arab one, in the time of the Arab Spring and about its concomitant incidents. It offers a view of how the West see us as democratic uprisers, demonstrating against bureaucracy and how they take the opportunity to make our chaos serve their interests. Hence, it condemns the West for their exploitative role. Second, the play shows that complaints that are disattended bring disastrous storms of uncontrollable anger that cannot be opposed. The play argues that disaffiliation is the expected effect of passing and disattending another’s complaint.

### **3. Research Questions:**

This research paper attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the strategies that people manipulate to enact their complaints?
2. What is the relationship between disattending another’s complaint and disaffiliation in interaction?
3. Is it possible for people to disattend another’s complaint even though if it occurs within a complaint frame? And if so, how?
4. How can disaffiliation occur?
5. What is the relationship between questioning and disaffiliation?
6. What is the role of subtle and blatant disattending in the interpretation of Nick Witby’s ‘*The Complaint*’?

#### **4.Theoretical Preliminaries:**

##### **4. a.Complaints:**

Complaints are widely used by people to express their dissatisfaction and discontentment about persons or things. A complaint is “any type of comment with even the slightest negative valence” (Heinmann and Traverso, 2009: 2383). This also goes with Zhou and Ganesan (2016: 110) who state that a negative sentence is referred to as a complaint “if it has a negative connotation with supplemental information, answering the question of why a topic or aspect is negative”. Consider the following examples:

- 1.“This company takes your payment.”
2. “This company takes your payment, but on the day of scheduled job they don’t appear”. (ibid)

Here, the first sentence is less informative as it only includes the negative connotation ‘This company takes your payment.’ But the second example is more informative than the first one because it follows the negative connotation with the supplemental information, ‘on the day of the scheduled job, they don’t appear’, which clarifies the causes of the complaint.

Sometimes speakers do not state directly that they are complaining. They tend to hide their complaint under the cover of praise. Sacks (1992: 358) notices the relationship between a complaint and a praise. He points out that a complaint “may routinely be constructed in the form of a piece of a praise plus ‘but’ plus something else. Examples:

- 1.“I will admit that it was relatively clean but the furniture was old, scuffed and so plain.” (Vasquez, 2011: 1710)
- 2.“Usually not one to complain but the service is just terrible” (ibid, 2011: 1713).

Boxer (1996: 219) divides a complaint into two types: direct and indirect. According to him, a speaker who expresses exasperation or discontent as a result of a past or a present action that affects him inappropriately is doing a direct complaint. In other words, a direct complaint is mainly directed to the person responsible for the inconvenience. Example: “Whoever owns this should be ashamed, this is not a 3 star, it’s a no star” (Vasquez, 2011:

1713). On the other hand, a speaker who expresses displeasure to a hearer about himself, someone or something that is absent is doing an indirect complaint. In an indirect complaint, the complaint is submitted to a third party other than the recipient of the complained about affair. Example:

“A: I sat through yesterday’s class with total non-comprehension.

B: Oh, yesterday was the worst!” (Boxer, 1996: 219)

This exchange is between two scholars who express their annoyance about yesterday’s class as they found their course illegible. So, it is an example of an indirect, or a third party, complaint.

Olshtain and Weinbach (1987: 195) add another dimension to their definition of a complaint. It is the element of expectation. For them, a complaint occurs when an addresser expects a satisfying event to happen, and instead his expectations are not met to a great extent. In this condition, the addressee, or the one who is supposed to receive the complaint, is regarded as having “enabled or failed to prevent the offensive event”. According to Olshtain and Weinbach a complaint can be realized by the following five strategies: 1) below the level of reproach. Here the speaker decides not to blame the addressee directly. He does not even mention the negative act of the addressee. Rather, he just produces some utterances that do not reprimand the addressee. 2) Expressions of annoyance or disapproval. These are some utterances that express indirectly the speaker’s disapproval. In this case, the speaker mentions indirectly or implicitly that something wrong has happened without assigning responsibility to the addressee. 3) Explicit complaint. Here, the speaker expresses directly and explicitly blame to the addressee. He does not show any sort of mitigation. 4) Accusation. It happens when the speaker puts his addressee on a direct charge of something. This entails unfavourable consequences for the addressee. 5) Warning. By producing an utterance of warning, the speaker threatens his addressee immediately and may ask him to compensate for the defect caused by him.

#### **4. b. Disattending Complaints**

As mentioned before, people's reactions towards other's complaints are different. On his analysis of couples' complaint episodes during conflicts, Alberts (1992) stated that the couples practice one of six complaint episodes: passed, refocused, mitigated, responsive, unresponsive or escalated. Sacks and Schegloff (1977) discussed the same things also but labeled them differently as : disaffiliation with the action, declining to respond to it, disattending it, appreciating it, affiliating with it or escalating it. This also agreed with the aforementioned five proposed strategies of the speech act set of complaining by Olshtain and Weinbach (1987). Other researchers (De Capua, 1988; and Bolivar, 2002) added three more strategies: requests for repairs, justifications and criticism or evaluation. This paper deals with the phenomenon of disattending another's complaint and the consequent disaffiliation that results from this disattending. Disattending means neglecting the apparent action of complaining that the other is trying to do through his talk. It is "not to take up another's apparent complaint" (Mandelbaum, 1992: 97). It occurs when participants in the interaction do not cooperate. Hence, they build disaffiliative social relationships. Grice (1975: 45) argued that people engaged in a conversation must stick to what he called 'the cooperative principle': "Make your conversation such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange in which you are engaged". Within this principle, he proposed four maxims: 1) quantity, namely to make your contribution informative in a moderate way; 2) quality, namely to stick to the truth; 3) relation, namely to be appropriate and relevant; and 4) manner, namely to be clear and disambiguous. Check this example:

"Husband: Where are the car keys?

Wife: They're on the table in the hall" (Thomas, 1995: 64)

Here, both speakers adhere to the Gricean maxims. The wife's utterance is clear, truthful, rightly informative and direct. So, she does not invoke any implicature.

But conversations do not always proceed with all this cooperation. Sometimes, Grice's cooperative principles are flouted and not observed in so many cases. When people talk, they do not always give the required amount of information. Sometimes they are too informative and in some other cases they are abrupt. So, they flout the maxim of quantity. Also, they lie in so many cases maybe because they want to avoid mentioning something embarrassing or because they are afraid. So, they flout the maxim of quality. Moreover, sometimes their utterances are irrelevant and not related to what they are talking about. This occurs when people suddenly change the topic or when they give answers to the questions in a way that do not meet the expectations of their interlocutors. Hence, they flout the maxim of relation. And sometimes people circumlocute and do not get directly to the point. So, they flout the maxim of manner. Thomas (1995: 71) points out that people's flouting of Grice's maxims is due to a clash of goals rather than of maxims. For people manipulate their utterances in ways that serve the illocutionary forces, intentions or goals. Therefore, speakers become able to make inferences; and hearers become able to deduce implicatures. All this is managed with regard to 'pragmatics', 'face' and 'politeness'.

#### **4. c. Pragmatics and Social Relationships:**

Pragmatics is "the study of meaning in relation to the context in which a person is speaking or writing" (Paltridge, 2008: 53). People engaged in discourse are always required to keep an eye on politeness and face. Goffman (1967) originated the work on 'face' whereas Brown and Levinson (1987) developed it and introduced the term 'politeness theory' that inspected whether the speech act is 'face-saving' or 'face-threatening'. The point here is that the more people are direct, the more they are impolite. And the more they are indirect, the more they are polite. Lakoff (1973) introduced three maxims of politeness: 1) 'don't impose', e.g. "I am sorry to bother you but..."; 2) 'give options', e.g. "Do you think you could possibly..."; and 3) 'make your hearer feel good', e.g. "You're better at this than me" (in Paltridge, 2008:

72). According to Brown and Levinson's model (1987), people performing face threatening acts have to choose one of the following three superordinate strategies: 1) to do the act 'on-record', means without attempting to hide what we are doing; 2) to do the act 'off-record', means in a way that attempts to hide it; and 3) don't do the act at all.

Also, 'negative face' and 'positive face' are two further terms dealing with 'face' and 'politeness' (Scollon and Wong-Scollon, 2001; and Yule, 2007). Negative politeness is "the need to be independent and free from imposition" (Yule, 2007: 120). And positive face is "the need to be connected, to belong, to be a member of the group" (ibid). Scollon and Wong-Scollon (2001- in Paltridge, 2008: 73) discussed the same things but called them "involvement" and "independence". Finegan (1994: 354) called them "sociability" and "privacy". In order to maintain successful face-saving relationships, speakers have to be alert to keep these features of one's face at the same time. Social relationships are either built or destroyed via affiliative or disaffiliative interactions. Attending or disattending one's complaint is one of the ways through which people can achieve affiliation or disaffiliation with each other. Mandelbaum (1992: 98) categorizes disattended complaints into two main types: blatant and subtle.

#### **4. d. Blatant Disattending:**

Blatant disattending occurs in interactions when the speaker's response is blatantly irrelevant to the immediately previous turn. It is one of the techniques that people use to disorientate their hearers from the main topic and thus to postpone showing their disagreement. Consider the following exchanges between a mother and her son in the kitchen:

"Mother: Well that's the whole thing.'n that's the whole thing that I talking

          About. Is a fact th' you seem to feel th't you c'nt go blithely own,

Son: Where's my towel?

Mother: Your what?

Son: My towel" (Mandelbaum, 1992: 90).

Here, the son's utterance 'where's my towel?' is a blatant disattending. He does not take up his mother's complaint. He disorients her by his question which is not relevant to the proffered topic of the complaint.

#### **4. e. Subtle Disattending of Complaints:**

Subtle disattending of complaints occurs when the complaint is proposed in "a 'frame' for a subsequent 'neutral' talking" (Mandelbaum, 1992: 133). It happens where interlocutors subtly elicit another aspect of the complaining turn rather than orientating to the main topic of the complaint in the storytelling. Here, the speaker or the disattender avoids being engaged in the proposed action that his listener is expecting him to accomplish. In this way, the speaker has to make up his mind and choose either to cooperate with his interlocutor and thus become an affiliative attender, or not to cooperate with his interlocutor and thus become a disaffiliative disattender. Consequently, the complainer can reassert his complaint as a result of the recipient's disattending (ibid: 116). Check the following extract from a telephone conversation between two college students:

Bee: 'n how's school going.

Ava: Oh same old shit.

Bee: Shhhhh! t ! hh

Ava: I have a lot of tough courses

Bee: Uh really?

Oh I can imagine. What you told me watchu talking.

Ava: Oh God I have so much work

Bee: Tch!

Mmm.

Ava: But aside from that it's all right.

Bee: So what-

What?

Ava: I'm so tired. I just played basketball today since the first time since I

Was freshman in high school.

Bee: Baske (h)et

B(h)a(h)ll? Where.

Ava: Yeah for like an hour and a half

Bee:           hh  
           Where did you play basketball  
 Ava:           The gym  
 Bee: In the gym? (hh)  
 Ava:           Yeah. Like grou(h)p therapy.  
           You know half the group that we had  
 Bee:           Oh- hh  
 Ava:       las' term was there en we just playing around"  
 (Mandelbaum, 1992: 106-107).

In this extract, Ava subtly refuses to develop Bee's proffered topic on 'school'. By saying 'oh same old shit', she does not cooperate with Bee. She implies that there is nothing new to tell. Ava's later turnings are nothing but a series of complaints. She has 'a lot of tough courses'. Then by offering an assessment 'but aside from that it's all right', she attempts to sustain the force of her complaint. By stating clearly that 'she is tired', Ava reasserts her complaint. Then, she follows it with a news report about the basketball game framed by her complaint of being tired. At this point, Bee has to choose either to attend the complaint about tiredness and develop talk about it, or to disattend it and elicit talk about another available side of the complaining turn, 'basketball'. So, she disattends the apparent complaint frame and orients her talk towards the nice event, the game.

#### **4.f. Complaints and Disaffiliations in Interaction:**

Human language performs a multiplicity of functions in our life. It is used "to support the performance of social activities and social identities and to support human affiliation with cultures, social groups and institutions" (Gee, 2005: 1). From a pragmatic perspective, complaints are face threatening or constraining in the sense that complainers compel their interlocutors to provide a specific response that meets their intentions. Steensig and Drew (2008: 9) state that "affiliative moves are actions which agree with or take the same stance as co-participants". So, by attending and engaging in the complaint, we can show positive politeness and thus we can achieve affiliation in interaction. On the other hand, by disattending and attempting to avoid hearing the

complaint of the hearer, we display negative politeness and seem disaffiliative in interaction. Complaints in face-to-face interaction are face threatening because the participants know each other. Heinman and Traverso (2009: 2381) state that face-to-face complaints “require delicacy and implicitness because they make the complainant vulnerable”. They (ibid: 2382) elaborate and say that “who complains about whom/ what to whom is of major importance for the way the complaint develops.”

#### **4. g. Strategies of Disaffiliation in Interaction:**

Disaffiliation is realized through two main strategies: negative assessment and questioning. They both belong to the category of ‘adjacency pairs’ because one pair part entails the existence of the second pair part (Finegan, 1994: 349).

##### **4. g. 1. Second Assessment:**

Wherever a speaker suggests an assessment, hearers are obliged to afford a second assessment in which they have either to agree or disagree. Example:

“Speaker 1: I think Ralph is a pretty good writer.

Speaker2: I think so too.” (Finegan, 1994: 351)

In this example, speaker 2 offers an agreement as a preferred second part to the first part assessment produced by speaker 1.

On the other hand, disagreements are dispreferred second parts provided by one speaker in response to the assessment of the other one. Check this example:

“Speaker A: I think Ralph’s a pretty good writer.

Speaker B: Well, I can see how you’d find his imagery interesting, but

Apart from that I don’t really think he writes well at all.” (ibid: 351)

Pomerantz (1984) points out that the second assessment, whether it is an upgrade, the same, or a downgrade, will in one way or another affiliate or disaffiliate with the speaker who produced the first assessment. Consider the following examples:

1. An upgrade:

“A: Isn’t he cute?

B: O::h he::s a::DORABLE.” (Pomerantz, 1984: 65)

2.The same:

“C: ... She was a nice lady- I liked her.

G: I liked her too.” (ibid: 67)

3.A downgrade:

“A: She’s a fox!

B: Yeh, she’s a pretty girl.” (ibid: 68)

Pomerantz maintains that disagreements are preceded by hesitation markers, such as ‘O’ and ‘Well’, delays or pauses. Finegan (1994: 351) adds that they start with a sign of agreement immediately followed by an excuse that includes an explanation.

Example:

“Customer: *First pair part of adjacency pair- request for information*

(Can you help me...)

Travel agent: *Dispreferred second pair part-request not met*

(well we’re not British Rail Agents...)

Customer: *Invites a less dispreferred second pair part*

Oh I see.” (Grundy, 2000: 193)

#### 4. g. 2. Questioning:

Traditionally speaking, declarative sentences are used to state things (Palmer, 1981: 149- 153). Imperatives are used to perform a directive function (Crystal, 2003: 299). Interrogatives are used to ask questions and elicit information (Leech, 1983: 114-115). But in every day interaction, things are not that simple and direct. Sometimes declaratives are used to ask questions. Also grammatical questions are manipulated indirectly to perform a multiplicity of functions. In addition to their capacity of interrogating, they are used to suggest, e.g. “why don’t we...”, to invite, e.g. “why don’t you come over...”, to make a request, e.g. “would you pass me...”, and to complain, e.g. “why don’t you ever...” (Steensig and Drew, 2008: 6). So, the crucial point here is related to the role the questions perform in creating affiliation or disaffiliation between participants in interaction. As mentioned before, the process of questioning or interrogating someone is considered disaffiliative.

Questions in English are of two types: polar and non-polar questions (Steensig and Drew, 2008: 5). Polar questions are those

questions whose expected answers are the interjections ‘yes’, ‘no’ or their equivalents. They begin with an auxiliary verb or a modal verb. And their answers are always short and abrupt. Positive polar questions are neutral in the sense that their answers are either ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Example: “Are you going?” may have the answers ‘yes’ or ‘no’ whereas negative polar questions are biased as their expected answers are always negative. Example: “Aren’t you going?” presupposes the answer ‘no, I am not’ (Wardhaugh, 2003). On the other hand non-polar questions are those questions which start with a questioning particle, e.g. ‘what’, ‘who’, ‘when’, etc. They are always used to get more elaborate information. Therefore, they are also called “content questions” or “wh-questions” (Dryer, 2014; Steensig and Drew, 2008; And Noh, 1995). Syntactically speaking, questions are sentences whose verbs are inverted with their subjects (Crystal, 2003: 400; and Alexander, 1997: 249-262). In fact, questioning plays a major role in the development of any conversation. Questions, like ‘who’ is asking ‘whom’ about ‘what’, ‘when’ ‘how’ and ‘where’, are all relevant. Also, ‘who’ is holding the floor as opposed to ‘who’ is yielding it helps draw conclusions about disaffiliative relationships. “The question itself is part of frame in which the answer as an answer operates” (Stubbs, 1983: 105).

Bahadur (2014: 202-206; and Richards and Richards, 2002: 437) classify questions into seven types: alternative, exclamatory, echo, rhetorical, tag, wh-, and yes/no. According to him, ‘yes-no questions’ are those questions whose reply is either ‘yes’ or ‘no’, e.g. “Have you had lunch?”; ‘wh-questions’ are those formed by using question particles like what, why, when, etc. , e.g. “Where’s Netya’s house?”; ‘tag-questions’ are short questions “tacked onto statements” (Stageberg, 2000: 190) ; they require agreement or disagreement; and their pronoun should be matching with the subject of the statement, e.g. “The film was boring, wasn’t it?”; ‘rhetorical questions’ are those questions whose speakers don’t expect answers for them. A rhetorical question is a strong statement with the form of a question, e.g. “Can anyone count the stars?”; ‘echo questions’ are questions that repeat a part or the whole of what has been said, e.g. “A: She

is a great pianist. B: She is what?"; echo questions can be used to show that the listener did not hear or perceive what the speaker has said very well; also they help express "the hearer's incredulity at what he heard" (Noh, 1995: 108); 'exclamatory questions' reflect the speaker's subjective feelings. Although they have the syntactic structure of a question, they end with an exclamation mark, e.g. "Isn't he smart?"; and the last type of questions is called 'alternative questions'. They are questions whose reply is to select one of the options given by the question itself, e.g. "Would you like to watch T.V. or chat online?" Collins (1990: 205) added one more type of questions called 'declarative questions'. He stated that "when you ask a question using the declarative mood, you expect the answer 'yes', unless you use a negative construction, in which case you expect the answer 'no'". Example: "A: Yesterday I met the doctor I told you about.

B: So, he gave you the treatment?" (ibid)

Generally speaking, declarative questions always have a final high-rise intonation.

### **5. Theoretical Framework:**

This research paper deals with disaffiliating another's complaint in Nick Witby's *The Coplaint*. It offers a pragmatic study of disaffiliation in interaction. The researcher selects the following theoretical framework for the analysis of the data: subtle disaffiliating, blatant disaffiliating, second assessment and questioning. Dealing with questioning, the researcher focuses on polar questions and echo questions.

The research shows that disaffiliation results from subtle as well as blatant disaffiliating of another's complaints. Also, it inspects second assessment, polar questions and echo questions as strategies for achieving disaffiliation in interaction. And in so doing, it shows that the frequent use of the authorities in institutional administrations of these devices sustains disaffiliative rather than affiliative relationships with their people.

### **6. Analysis of Nick Witby's "The Coplaint":**

As the play started, we knew that Afra, the protagonist, has introduced a framed complaint labeled "DV30" (Witby, 2012:2). However, the authorities on charge insisted on neglecting her

complaint. They disattended her complaint and they merely discussed subsidiary matters related to the complaint's form. They avoided discussing its content to the extent that we never knew what the complaint was about. In so doing, they wasted her time as well as theirs in dull bureaucratic routine, although they claimed that they were on her behalf. On dealing with her complaint, which was later followed by three other complaints due to their disaffiliative and non-satisfactory performance, the authorities manipulated subtle as well as blatant disattending strategies. Hence they generated disaffiliative feelings through second assessment, polar questions and echo questions.

**6. a. Subtle Disattending in Nick Witby's "The Complaint":**

On his first meeting with Afra, Mr Tabutanzer, the head authority, tells her that she "will have to answer a few questions" (ibid: 2). He puts her in the position of the passive party who is to be interrogated and repressed so that her complaint "may proceed in a merry fashion" (ibid). Of course, this sets us with the mood of disaffiliation that will be developed later through the whole play. Also, the use of the modal 'may' implies an indirect threat that if she does not conform to his orders, she will suffer because he has the power not to pass her complaint merrily. Then he subtly disattends her complaint as he shifts the topic to shortness of 'time'. Look at the following extract:

"Mr Tabutanzer. Please, draw your chair closer. These are simple formalities, so that you're your complaint may proceed in a merry fashion. If you cannot answer a question we shall return to it at the end, if we have time.

Afra. Time?

Mr Tabutanzer. There is a time limit. (*Noting it down off digital watch, which he sets.*)

Afra. Why?

Mr Tabutanzer. So that it's fair on the others. Although in this case there are no others. Forgive me, it's been so long since anyone has brought a complaint." (ibid: 2)

Here, Mr Tabutanzer succeeds in disorientating Afra from the main topic of their meeting, her complaints. He did so by adding the parenthetical conditional part "if we have time" to the main

clause. Afra's surprise is reflected by the use of the echo question "time?" The paradox here lies in the logic behind his justification. He claimed to be fair with those people who do not even exist. Then, he asked her some irrelevant polar questions, found in the form in front of him, just to pass the time limit of their meeting and to be able to leave happily. Look at this fragment:

"Mr. Tabutanzer. ...We are nearly there. Last question. Would you swear allegiance to the king?"

Afra. We don't have a king.

Mr Tabutanzer. No, we don't, that's right. (*Looks at the next page.*) I see, it continues '... if we had one'. There are three options once again... 'yes', 'no', and 'maybe'?

Afra. Is this another trap?

Mr Tabutanzer. I am sorry, I can't tell you that. (Softly.) Yes." (ibid: 4)

Mr tabutanzer's last polar question to Afra is another subtle disattending. He suddenly shifts the topic to her "allegiance to the king" who does not even exist. His utterance carries the presupposition that their country has a king. Afra perceives this and offers him a response that carries the implicature 'no'. But still he insists on being on- record and imposing upon her. He does so by asking her the 'alternative question', "if we had one...". Instead of choosing one of his offers, Afra replies in a way that implicitly means 'no' as she asks, "Is this another trap?" And the word "another" presupposes the existence of a 'first' trap. Thus, she tells him indirectly that she understands his maneuvering. However, this didn't work with him. As the alarm went off on Mr Tbutanzer's digital watch, he said with a big smile: "That was close. We're done" (ibid: 4).

On their second meeting, the same thing occurred also. Look at the following extract:

"Afra. There's a difficulty with my complaint?"

Mr Tabutanzer. No, no, the complaint is proceeding marvelously well. They just had one small concern.

Afra. Who are 'they'?

Mr Tabutanzer. No one. Merely a turn of phrase. All complaints are sent as a matter of course to an independent advisory network, IAN. Ian casts an eye over the preliminary documents and recommends the best course for the complaint to take thereafter, if there's felt to be a problem.

Afra. So there's a problem..." (ibid: 7)

Again, he subtly disattends her complaint as he shifts the talk to "Ian" and their "concern". So, he takes the conversation to another direction that is totally different from the main one, Afra's complaint. In fact, he is an expert in subtle attending. He does this by the use of reference through the pronoun "they" and the conditional 'if' that imply that the complaint is not proceeding at all. Therefore, he takes the chance and "recommends" her to "someone who can help" (ibid: 7). This indirectly tells us that Mr Tabutanzer did her nothing. And so he left her.

Afra's meeting with the suggested person, Dawn Birdcatcher, did not go any better. Afra found herself with another dull, gloomy and contradictory trap of bureaucracy. This is reflected in the way Birdcatcher introduced herself to Afa. She said: "Now, let me tell you a bit about me. My name is Dawn Birdcatcher, hello... and I'm the Society Liaison Advisor. However, you must understand that I don't work for the Society. I'm only attached to the Society. I'm leading on your case for the Society but I'm not from the Society" (ibid: 8). Birdcatcher's speech with Afra is planned to deviate Afra from her main target, her complaint. And again it works. Birdcatcher subtly disattends Afra's complaint by telling her about herself and her work. Even when Afra attempted to cooperate with Birdcatcher and to ask her a polar question that makes her, means Afra, understand the nature of Birdcatcher's work, she was denied that right. Look at this dialogue:

"Afra. Can I ask you another question?"

Dawn Birdcatcher. No. Not that I can answer. That would be giving advice. I'm here not to advice, but to listen to you, and by listening, assist you in understanding the nature of your concerns.

Afra. My concerns?

Dawn Birdcatcher. Ian's concerns.

Afra. There was only one, as I understand it. They felt...

Dawn Birdcatcher. It. Ian's network. The Independent Advisory Network. It.

Afra. I said it felt it didn't feel it knew enough about me, as an individual, and it wanted to get to know me better before assessing the substance of my complaint." (ibid:10-11)

People in this dull administration refuse to cooperate with her. They want just to practice their authority over her. Birdcatcher is a striking example of the authority who pretends to be helpful to his people whereas he really does not do anything for them. He neglects their complaints and subtly disattends them. Birdcatcher always provides for new topics. Firstly, she tells about herself; secondly, about her work; thirdly, about her personal disorientation; fourthly, about the concerns; etc. She does everything but not a serious discussion of Afra's complaint. Afra's several attempts to cooperate with these authorities are always rejected. Afra's echo question "my concerns?" is repaired to become "Ian's concerns". And the reference "they" is repaired to "it". So the result is disorientation. It appears in Afra's "I said it felt it didn't feel it knew..."

Afra did not give up. She went back again to Mr Tabutanzer to submit another complaint. Consider the following exchange:

"Mr Tabutanzer. Can I ask you how you managed to find your way past security?"

Afra. I waited until it was asleep. I'm sorry I didn't make an appointment. I'm here because I wish to lodge another complaint. A second complaint.

Mr Tabutanzer. I see. Did you not meet with the Liaison Advisor?"

Afra. It concerns the Liaison Advisor." (ibid: 13)

Mr Tabutanzer's question to Afra about the way by which she managed to enter his room presupposes that people are not allowed to meet him without permission. That is why Afra said "sorry". And this reflects the idea that the doors of these authorities are shut in front of people. The authorities physically and socially disaffiliate themselves from people. But after all this

trouble, Mr Tabutanzer did not offer Afra any help. Again, he subtly disattended her complaint by shifting the talk towards “the Liaison Advisor”. And he kept repeating this process of disattending several times. Look at this conversation:

“Afra. It seemed to me, rather than to listen to the details of my complaints, as I had been led to believe was the purpose...

Mr Tabutanzer. By who?

Afra. By you.

Mr Tabutanzer. Go on.

Afra. It seemed in fact to be to morally blackmail me.

Mr Tabutanzer. Morally?

Afra. Yes.” (ibid: 14)

Afra understood clearly Birdcatcher’s hidden intentions and interpreted them as a “moral blackmail”. She knew that this Birdcatcher and many others similar to her in the institutions of society are elusive and liars. That is why she told Mr Tabutanzer that she used to tape record all her conversations with authorities in order to be able to keep her rights. But Mr Tabutanzer’s response was not better than that of Birdcatcher. He did not ask about the content of Afra’s complaint also. Rather, he sent her to “Internal Complaints” this time.

Unfortunately, the “Internal Complaints” turned to be Dawn Birdcatcher again. She was promoted to be the Internal Complaints Manager. Although Mr Tabutanzer has told Afra that Birdcatcher was removed to be disciplined, she showed up again. She became Afra’s opponent and judge at the same time. For the first time, Afra’s complaint tends to be a direct one because she is introducing it to the person from whom she is complaining. Afra realizes Birdcatcher’s hidden intentions towards her. She says to Birdcatcher: “I think this is being done to divert me, because you can’t find anything wrong with my complaint” (ibid: 20). But Birdcatcher insists on disattending Afra’s complaint. This time Birdcatcher shifts the topic and talks about her affair with Mr Tabutanzer. She blames Afra, the victim, and makes her responsible for her cheating on her husband, Truman. Birdcatcher, Truman’s wife, confesses to Afra that she is in love with Mr Tabutanzer. She says to Afra: “ It’s all your fault. If it

hadn't been for your complaint, nothing would've happened" (ibid: 20). That pushed Afra to make a third complaint. And again she was asked to get an appointment.

After four months, Afra went to the administration to ask about her complaints. There, she found Mr Tabutanzer and Truman celebrating. On asking them about her complaint, their answer was surprising. Check these lines:

"Afra. Is this celebration connected to my complaint?

Mr Tabutanzer. It is, indeed, indeed connected. To your complaint. How did you know that?

I can tell you very happily, that because of the most unsatisfactory way this department has handled your complaint, that we are to receive a massive increase of funding.

Truman. It's a great vote of confidence in the future of the department."(ibid: 23)

Instead of telling her what happened to her complaint, he told her about what happened to them and to their department. And he disattended her complaint by the polar question "How did you know that?" After that his bus came. And before leaving he told her that her complaint is now in Truman's "capable hands".

Afra's meetings with Truman were worse. He was ultimately non cooperative and disaffiliative with her. Look at this fragment:

"Afra. What has happened to my complaint?

Truman. In what sense?

Afra. Where is it?

Truman. Where?

Afra. In the process. What has happened to it in these four months?

Truman. I see, in that sense. Your complaint has been upheld." (ibid: 25)

Truman is exactly like all his colleagues. They all disattend her. He responds to her first question by another question. He wants to disorientate her attention. But the problem with Afra is that she is determined and she knows her target quite well. And this is what leads Truman to use blatant disattending with her. He does so because he wants to postpone the talk about the content of her

complaint. So, he asks her to sign forms in which she expresses her assent on the way they will deal with her, including the use of restraints and electrical shocks through the polygraph. He tells her that these procedures are for the benefit of the processing of her complaint. And she accepted.

**6. b. Blatant Disattending in Nick Witby's *'The Complaint'*:**

Truman turned his meeting with Afra into interrogations. As we see Afra in the building, we know that she is not allowed to leave. They detained her and kept her under arrest. And instead of discussing her complaint, Truman started interrogating her about terrorism in their society. Look how he blatantly disattended her complaint:

“Truman. Why are you terrorizing our society?

Afra. I'm not.

Truman. Is your plan to bring the whole edifice down upon your ears?

Afra. No.

Truman. Then what are you doing here?

Afra. Only seeing through my complaint.

Truman. So you say. Your life seems to have been designed to cause trouble. Everything you have done seems to have been for that purpose. And this is a coincide?

Afra. Yes.

Truman. Tell me again, what you say you do?

Afra. Nothing?

Truman. Where? Do you do it?

Afra. Anywhere.” (ibid: 27)

By using blatant disattending, Truman turned Afra into a terrorist whose acts threaten the safety of the Society. He kept interrogating Afra, using polar questions, wh- questions and tags to put the words in her mouth. He asked her about her standing on the plinth on the square and her walking in demonstrations there. He tried to charge her of being “a public artist without a licence” (ibid: 37). He considered art a crime. He told her that she knew that she was observed by the Society. Therefore, she is

facing “the extremely serious charge of being a self- appointed artist” (ibid: 38). Look at these exchanges:

“Afra. But no one is looking at me, here. Apart from Miss Birdcatcher.

Truman. But they are! They are looking at you by your absence.

Afra. Who are?

Truman. Well, for a start, the many thousands of people who follow your activities on their ‘social media’!

*Afra looks astonished.*

You had no idea?

Afra. No

Truman. (*Checking the polygraph*) Indeed you did not, you did not. (*Flaring*) How are you managing to do this? You are unaware that each day you remain in this building these people ... (*Checking his notes*) ‘Twitter’ for your release? That you are a focus of this activity?

Afra. I’m sorry. I thought you would become rhetorical.” (ibid: 38)

Truman’s attempts to make Afra confess her guilt about any crime she did not commit failed. He complained to Mr Tabutanzer and Birdcatcher from Afra that “there’s nothing about her that’s tangibly objectionable. No ideology. No book or manifesto at her heart. I’ve woken at nights dreaming she was a jihadist, her breasts explosives... a fantasy. There is nothing there to apprehend” (ibid: 47). But as the “reforming wind” blew, everything’s been in such a flux, as Birdcatcher said. And the situation turned upside down by their detainment of Afra for a long time. She became an activist and the people outside were calling for her release. That put this bureaucratic administration in a very hectic situation. And that is why they decided to assassinate her. Truman called the Internal Complaints, means Birdcatcher, and asked her to help him get rid of Afra. Check these exchanges:

“Truman. We have to dispose of her.

Birdcatcher. What do you mean?

Truman. Get rid of her for me.

Birdcatcher. I’m not your mother.

Truman. What are you talking about? My mother would never get rid of someone for me, even if I begged her.” (ibid: 40)

Birdcatcher’s “I’m not your mother” is a blatant disattending. Instead of complying with her husband’s request, she said so. She knows that she belongs to the Society with its administrations, yet she is torn between her job and her conscience. She is a flirt. However, she does not want to be involved in killing. She states that she is worried because “assassination is a new territory” for her (ibid: 44). Blatant disattending helped Birdcatcher to escape from this situation. She called Mr Tabutanzer to perform the mission. But the situation became more difficult. The administrators realized that as there wasn’t sufficient evidence against Afra, so “the business cannot be resolved in the old way. You’re right, to dispose of her like this is worse than meaningless. This innocence can only travel. And there are plenty more like her, out there. Young” (Ibid: 46). The ‘old way’ carries the implicature that it was faulty and stupid. Contrarily, the ‘modern way’ that they are about to apply is more cunning and effective. Therefore, after negotiations about the way through which they kill her, they finally decided to release her. They realized that if they are to inherit the world, they have to take the chance and swim towards the wave that imperils them and “meet it beyond the shallows that rears to its deadly height!” (ibid: 52).

### **7. Questioning and Second Assessment:**

There were many situations in this play where the Administrators attempted to enforce Afra to produce second assessments. Look at these exchanges:

1. “Mr Tabutanzer. ...I am delighted to inform you it has been almost unanimously approved. Isn’t that fine?

Afra. Yes. Yes it is.” (ibid: 5)

2. “Birdcatcher. I think you’re so lucky to have Mr Tabutanzer working on your behalf. Although he is an immigrant to this country he’s a very dedicated man. Don’t you think so?

Afra. Yes, very.” (ibid: 8)

3. “Birdcatcher. It’s the devil to find, isn’t it?

Afra. I had a compass.” (ibid: 18)

4. “Birdcatcher. It infuriates me, and I’m not you.

Afra. It won't work, you know." (ibid: 21)

5. "Birdcatcher. I'm so admiring of what you're doing, taking on the Society like this, so brave. Sacrificing yourself. It must be hard to maintain the mask.

Afra. Do you mind if I don't speak?" (ibid: 34)

The administrators manipulated questioning, in particular tag questions in order to get second assessments from Afra. These exchanges reflect Afra's feelings towards the administrators. In the first two exchanges, she agreed upon the assessment for the sake of politeness and affiliation. Notice that by that time, her complaints were still 'indirect'. But later on, the feelings of disaffiliation started to develop and also her complaints turned to be 'direct'. Hence, in the third exchange, she said "I had a compass" instead of responding to the tag question with 'yes'. So, she avoided giving an assessment. In the fourth exchange, things became clearer, so Afra became more direct. Of course, this response reflects her disagreement. And in the fifth example, Afra preferred silence. This is the peak of disaffiliation because we know that sometimes silence speaks louder than words.

### **7. a. Polar Questions:**

Nick Witby manipulated polar questions in a way that reflected Afra's gradual turning from affiliation to disaffiliation. The authorities' use of polar questions imposed on her and threatened her. Check these examples:

1. "Afra. Can I ask you another question?"

Birdcatcher. No. Not that I can answer. That would be giving an advice. I'm not here to advice, but to listen to you, and by listening, assist you in understanding the nature of your concerns." (ibid: 10)

2. "Afra. ... Is this the best possible scheme?"

Truman. No, we're not allowed to advice" (ibid: 43)

3. "Truman. Once more. Are you an artist?"

Afra. No

Truman. Are you an artist?"

Afra. No" (ibid: 35)

4. “Truman. Is it why you’ve been chosen to lead this attack on our Society?”

Afra. I don’t think I’ve been chosen for anything.” (ibid: 35)

5. “Birdcatcher. Were you generally satisfied with the outcome of your complaint?”

Afra. (*after a moment*). Yes.

Birdcatcher. Was there anything in the way your complaint was dealt with that you felt could have been improved?

Afra. No

Birdcatcher. Was the process clear and understandable?

Afra. Yes.

Birdcatcher. Were those who dealt with your complaint polite and helpful?

Afra. Yes. At times.

Birdcatcher. Have you suffered any permanent injury or damage during the process of your complaint?

Afra. No

Birdcatcher. Have you suffered death or loss of property as a result of the processing of your complaint?

Afra. No

Birdcatcher. Would you recommend bringing a complaint to the Society to anyone you know? If the answer to this question is ‘no’ please state briefly why.

Afra. I’d rather not say.

Birdcatcher. If you would rather not say please explain briefly ‘why’.

Afra. No.” (ibid: 55)

In all these examples, Afra belongs to the weak party. In the first two examples, she asked the authorities polar questions to get help from them. Although they belong to the Independent Advisory Network, as they say, they say that they cannot advise her. They refused to cooperate with her. And this reflects the paradox in this Society. But, in the next three examples, she was the one who has to afford answers to the questions of the authorities. They asked her polar questions and this type of questions does not give her the freedom to talk much. They restricted her freedom as their answers require only ‘yes’ or ‘no’.

In the third example, Truman asked Afra if she is an artist. He pushes her to the direction of saying ‘yes’ by repeating the same question twice. Later on, he told her directly about his intentions. He said to her: “That’s why I ask again if you’re an artist. If you are we can end this here and now” (ibid: 37). But for the third time, Afra told him that she is not an artist. She refused to surrender to him. In the fourth example, Truman also was following the same procedure with Afra. He wanted to get anything objectionable in her character. However, he didn’t find. And in the fifth example, Birdcatcher asked Afra polar questions also in order to get an assessment about the performance of the administrators who handled her complaint. She used these questions in order to minimize the amount of Afra’s participation. So, she made Afra develop disaffiliative feelings. This appeared clearly in Afra’s last utterance, “I would rather not say”, which implied ‘no’.

#### **7. b. Echo Questions:**

Nick Witby used echo questions repeatedly to reflect Afra’s feeling of astonishment and disaffiliation towards the authorities in the administration. Also, echo questions help echo the paradox in this Society. They make us question things around us, even the names of the characters. We come to discover that Truman is not true; Dawn Birdcatcher is a hope killer as she has nothing to do with dawn except to catch birds that search for food and life. Of course birds here are young people, like Afra; Mr Tabutanzer is a character that does not have taboos. He makes a utilitarian benefit from every situation; and Afra is not afraid. She is the promising hope that takes on Society courageously and calls for change. Look at the following exchanges:

1. “Truman. ... Your complaint has been upheld.

Afra. Upheld?

Truman. Indeed.

Afra. By who?

Truman. The Complaint Review Committee.

Afra. When did that happen?

Truman. Tomorrow.

Afra. They upheld it tomorrow?

Truman. No. That would make no sense at all. They will meet tomorrow. But in order to meet they first have to uphold the complaint.” (ibid: 25)

2. “Afra. What’s this?

Truman. A statement that there has been a complaint, and that it has been dealt with, and everyone has acted correctly, and you haven’t felt under any threat, personally, or pressure.

Afra. Threat?

Truman. Yes, it’s rather silly formal language, but it’s necessary I’m afraid.” (ibid: 42)

In these extracts, Afra used echo questions through the repetition of a part of the previous statement to express her negative feelings of disaffiliation towards these people. Moreover, these echo questions make us, as audience, practice the sense of bitter laugh through such scenes where we perceive the hypocrisy and gloominess of these authorities. They want to keep their face and seem cooperative, although in reality they are far from this. They are liars, threatening and non-cooperative. And that is why thousands of people became against them.

### **8. Conclusion:**

This research paper has studied disattending another’s complaints in Nick Witby’s *‘The Complaint’*. It studied disaffiliation in interaction from a pragmatic perspective. In so doing, it showed that disattending another’s complaint and disaffiliation in interaction are closely related to the extent that you cannot study one and leave the other. The paper argued that disaffiliation resulted from people’s disattending of other’s complaints. It showed that disattending is not always blatant and clear. Rather, it is subtle most of the time. The paper claimed that second assessment, polar questions and echo questions are the strategies that speakers use to face-threaten others and hence establish disaffiliation. The research argued through the analysis of Nick Witby’s *‘The Complaint’* that the frequent disattending of other’s complaints will bring nothing but storms of uncontrollable anger. Also it showed clearly that once a country falls, it becomes difficult to get up again because the administrators of the world, including the West, will gain benefit from it. So, we have to be careful whenever we deal with each other.

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