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Diversity is best

A literary analysis of how Mark Haddon's "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" may promote understanding and awareness towards the social construct of neurodiversity



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Abstract

This essay investigates how the first person narrative of Mark Haddon's neurodiverse protagonist in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* raises awareness for the complexity of neurodiversity in relation to a neurotypical society. This has been done by applying the critical lens of Disability Studies and Disability Studies in Education to explain how disability is a concept of social and cultural construct. As the Swedish school has failed to provide neurodiverse students with the inclusive environment they need, the importance of fostering students who are accepting towards cognitive disabilities is greater than ever. This essay therefore argues that an inclusion of Haddon's novel in the EFL classroom could be used to provide the students with understanding for neurodiversity as well as strategies that could help them to navigate in a socially demanding society.

Keywords

Neurodiversity, English Level 6, Fundamental Values, Autism Spectrum Disorder, Neurotypicality, Social Model of Disability, Accurate Representation, Self-determination, Impairments, Disability

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1 Introduction

I see everything. That is why I don't like new places. . . . it is like when a computer is doing too many things at the same time and the central processor unit is blocked up and there isn't any space left to think about other things. . . . And sometimes, when I am in a new place and there are lots of people there it is like a computer crashing . . . (Haddon 174, 177-78)

This metaphorical description of what the world can be perceived like for a person on the autism spectrum comes from the protagonist, and first-person narrator, in Mark Haddon's award-winning novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2004). In the novel, Haddon presents the reader with the mind style of the young, and what is perceived to be autistic, protagonist Christopher Boone, as he decides to take on the world outside his normally calm and routine-controlled environment. This decision leads Christopher into numerous unfamiliar social situations, and through this journey he paints an alternative picture of how socially complex colloquial events actually may be. Thus, Haddon's novel provides its reader with an insight in how the world is perceived from a neurodiverse fifteen-year-old's perspective through his attempts to navigate in a, in many ways, socially dependent contemporary society (Van Hart 29).

Although this has caused the novel to be widely hailed by critics, it has also received critique due to its portrait of Christopher as an autistic savant¹, as it may lead an unsuspecting reader to create an extreme, and at times stereotypical, generalisation of what autism actually implies (Loftis 124-25). Likewise, the explicit portrayal of Christopher being autistic is merely mentioned on the cover, but it is never specified within the pages of the novel itself. However, as Sonya Freeman Loftis describes, "an audience with an even glancing familiarity with autism will conclude that Christopher

¹ A condition in which an autistic individual has an ingenious knowledge area that stands as a contrast to their overall disability (Treffert 1351).

Boone is on the spectrum” (124). In accordance, it could be said that Christopher's diagnosis is an implicit part of the plot. Further, it is important to remember that Haddon's Christopher comprises one representation of the autistic spectrum out of many. Based on this, it is suggested that *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* nevertheless presents a convincing, and in many ways realistic, description of what the world may look like from a neurodiverse point of view (Baron-Cohen 449).

Pursuant to the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health, the definition of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) “is a developmental disorder that affects communication and behaviour” (“Autism”)². This means that individuals, like Haddon's Christopher, who find themselves on the spectrum generally experience difficulties with interaction and social communication, and show signs of having restricted daily activities and interests. Consequently, these symptoms may limit a person with ASD to experience full functionality in their everyday societal life, which could generate a sense of being misunderstood by the neurotypical public (Natl. Inst. of Mental Health, U.S., “Autism”). Still, disability studies scholar Rosemarie Thomson explains that said complications of functionality are not to be seen as a problem that lies within disabled individuals themselves, but rather within the cultural surroundings in which they function (2). It is thereby implied that the social difficulties and feelings of exclusion that may follow an ASD diagnosis can be seen as consequences of a society that lacks appropriate strategies to understand itself in relation to cognitive diversity.

However, as stated in an investigational report made by the Swedish National Agency for education in 2009, there has recently been an upsurge of attention towards the complexity of neurodiversity in relation to this issue in Swedish education (6).

Because although neurodiversity has been a well-known matter to the school since the 1980s, it has not yet gained the assiduity that is required to truly achieve the educational

² “Autism” and “autistic” will be used as synonyms for ASD, which is a common convention within ASD literature, according to Buxbaum and Hof (1).

aim to create an equal school system that builds on mutual understanding among all its actors (Natl. Ag. for Ed. “The School and Asperger’s syndrome” 6). Pursuantly, the importance of creating an inclusive society that is permeated with awareness of cognitive disabilities, as well as knowledge on how to build healthy relationships with people, is now a greater issue than ever (Douglas et al. 14). Thereof, in accordance with the Swedish curriculum for Upper Secondary School, the school’s responsibility to raise empathic individuals who are understanding and accepting towards other people, regardless of who they might be or behave, is imperative (Natl. Ag. for Ed. 4).

As there are no explicit methods established in the Swedish educational frameworks on how to provide students with the strategies which may allow them to appropriate said awareness for neurological disabilities, much of the responsibility is laid on the individual teacher’s pedagogical ingenuity. Yet, owing to the research made by Maria Nikolajeva, it is suggested that literature that comments on societal structures and practices may function as a valuable tool to provide adolescents with aforementioned societal knowledge and strategies (31). Accordingly, Nikolajeva explains that fictional worlds, in this regard, may guide students into becoming well-functioning citizens who are aware of the socially accepted norms, relationships and behaviours that current day societies expect of its citizens (31). That is to say, to be inclusive and compassionate towards all (Natl. Ag. for Ed. “Curriculum” 4).

Thus, the aim of this essay is to investigate how a literary piece like *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* may be used to encourage people’s understanding of neurodiversity, using disability studies as a point of departure. Yet, it is worth mentioning that even if disability studies has become an increasingly popular approach in literary research, “studies of cognitive difference have been largely omitted,” and particularly so when turning to ASD literature (Loftis 14). Therefore, this type of research is made highly relevant, considering the multiplicity that neurodiversity may

provide to disability studies. Additionally, the application of disability studies will afford this investigation the analytical tools needed to carry out a focused analysis of the complexity of a normatively neurotypical society's response to neurodiversity, which is actively commented on in Haddon's novel. The analysis will be carried out through a discourse analysis of the primary source, which entails a close reading of interactive passages and interior monologue that are expressed in Haddon's novel, to uncover the workings of the dominant discourse on neurodiversity in the depiction of society.

Moreover, this essay will include pedagogical implications detailing how Haddon's novel may be used in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in English level 6, to teach students how to navigate in contemporary society, and the importance of showing awareness and compassion for others (Natl. Ag. for Ed. "Curriculum" 4). As Stuart Murray states that ASD often is seen as a foreign phenomenon (105), it is important that literary representations of ASD are accurate and self-determining (Murray 40, 211). Thereof, a critical stance to how Haddon's novel addresses these aspects is implemented in the pedagogical analysis. This will be done by applying the perspective of Disability Studies in Education, with support from the Swedish syllabus and curriculum for the Upper Secondary School.

Subsequently, this essay argues that the internal focalization of Haddon's novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* may raise awareness for the complexity of living in a neurotypical society with the interactional and behavioural impairments due to ASD, provided that the critical lens of the social model of disability is used. In addition, this essay investigates the possibility that an inclusion of Haddon's novel in the EFL classroom may broaden students' understanding of the conflict between neurodiversity and neurotypicality, and thus guide them into developing collaborative strategies and communicative skills that may allow them to properly orient themselves in modern societies, regardless of their neurological state.

2 Disability studies

The following section presents the theoretical and pedagogical framework which will be used as a base for the literary analysis of Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. To explain the relationship between neurodiverse literature and education, the investigation is grounded on the theoretical fields Disability Studies and Disability Studies in Education. Additionally, an elucidatory passage on ASD is included to create a deeper understanding for the multiplicity of the diagnosis, and to provide the analytical tools needed to perform a profound analysis on the protagonist, Christopher.

2.1 Disability as a Continuously Problematic Concept

Prior to the 1970s, disabled people were one of the largest minority groups to be disregarded from attention and recognition in academic research. Previously, Robert Drake explains, disability was seen as a state that needed to be cured or rehabilitated in order to fit an able-bodied reality (148). Along these lines, Carol Thomas adds, a medical model of disability developed, which represented the idea of non-disabled people being what was considered normal and acceptable, while the concept of disability referred to people who were considered abnormal or deficit (38). Thus, these conceptions generated a stigmatisation to the notion of being disabled, causing both attitudinally and physically excluding barriers between a disabled, and non-disabled, population (Thomas 38). Accordingly, disabled people's right to self-determination was significantly constrained, as that was being made for them by a non-disabled majority.

However, according to Colin Barnes et al., an increased interest for disability rights emerged in Western societies along with the appearance of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, which called for recognition of discriminating structures and inequality (2). Hence, this instigated debate and assiduity in the area of disability, with

the purpose to understand and criticize the discriminatory practices that excluded disabled people from the collective non-disabled society. Subsequently, as explained by Dan Goodley, this came to fruition in a field of research known as disability studies (22). Within this field, Barnes clarifies, the social model of disability developed, which seeks to initiate a change in the social status for disabilism and fortify a shift from looking at single individuals' impairments being the reason behind impediments, to hostile social attitudes and disabling environments (43-44). Thereupon, the common view of disability has been subject to recent attempted re-definition to attain a more inclusive societal structure in Western societies (Thomas 39). Seeing that society is a constantly evolving ground, so becomes the concept of disability and disability studies.

2.1.1 Disability as a Cultural and Social Construct

As implied, it may be asserted that disability is culturally and socially constructed. For instance, Len Barton explains that since impairment previously has been viewed from medical and psychological perspectives, it has come to create a societal and cultural hegemony of the concept (6). This is clarified by Brueggemann et al., who describe that

Impairment is a physical difference - a difference in hearing, vision, mobility, brain function. Disability is more than impairment; disability is what society makes of that impairment in constructing "disability" as the opposite of ... "normality". (Brueggemann et al. 372-73)

This means that the way in which people, non-disabled as well as disabled, look upon impairment is still influenced by past ideas of it being something "invalid" (Shakespeare 217). Thus, this strengthens the construct of impairment being a deprivation.

Moreover, Tom Shakespeare states that such ideas are constantly distributed in society, via everything from the terminology that is used about disabled people, to the physical obstacles in societal structures such as signs, inaccessibly built buildings and

public transport (217). Consequently, Barton explains, these limiting structures become a way for society to exercise power, and thereby socially marginalise disabled individuals (9-10). Further, these representations contribute to creating both conscious and unconscious attitudes of what it means to be disabled, which can perpetuate helplessness and oppression (Goodley 123). Thus, as clarified by Thomas, disability is something that “comes into being when aspects of contemporary social structure and practice operate to disadvantage and exclusion” through prejudice and restriction (43). Hence, disability is a problem that lies within the surrounding environment, rather than with affected individuals themselves (Thomson 2). Pursuantly, disability could be seen as a result of socially and culturally taught ideas and practices.

As a social consequence these attitudes establish a view of disabled people as being devalued others and even alienated, while the able-bodied become the higher valued norm. Disability then becomes the embodiment of the incomprehensible and unknown (Goodley 129). Accordingly, such values and attitudes cause society to legitimise their assumptions concerning impairment (Barton 7). Subsequently this may, as described by Barton, manifest itself in culturally built patronising behaviour, such as pity, labelling, over-protection, hostility or even questioning of the intelligence and social competence of disabled individuals (8). Since these attitudes are socially and culturally established, Shakespeare argues that it is our collective responsibility to work towards the emancipation of disabled people (215). Hence, Goodley suggests that this may be done by recognizing and questioning hegemonies, such as limiting societal structures and marginalising attitudes (123). Pursuantly, it is about listening to the voices of impairment, in order to deploy knowledge and understanding for what it really means to be disabled in contemporary society (Goodley 123).

2.1.2 Neurodiversity as an Integral Part of Disability Studies

Previously, the main focus in disability studies has been to examine and portray physical disabilities (Fraser x-xi). Therefore, Loftis explains that the issue of neurodiversity and other “studies of cognitive difference have been largely omitted” in this field of research, as well as in literary representations of disability (14). In other words, when looking to mental disabilities that are not directly detectable through a visible trait, there is yet research to be made within the disability studies arena.

However, disability studies is a relatively young field of research that is in constant development. For this reason Benjamin Fraser claims that it is imperative to work for a broadening of the field by suggesting that disability studies scholars provide neurodiverse disabilities an equal amount of social and cultural attention (29). This is especially arguable as the notion of having an invisible disability adds to the risk, as well as complexity, of encountering misjudgement from the neurotypical society due to their impairments, than had they had a visible disability (Ruggles Gere 58). This is in return supported by David Connor et al., who explain that mental disabilities, such as ASD, are indeed in need of such recognition in order to gain a more emancipatory understanding and acceptance (450). Based on this, it can be claimed that neurodiversity should to a larger extent be seen as integral to disability studies, considering the multiplicity it might provide to the field. In accordance, the present inquiry serves to ameliorate this dearth of studies.

2.1.2.1 Autism Spectrum Disorder

As will be analysed in Haddon’s novel, Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) entails various difficulties with social communication and interaction for a diagnosed individual, which may affect a person’s ability to “function properly in school, work and other areas of life” (Natl. Inst. of Mental Health, U.S., “Autism”). Yet, it is important to remember that all people are individuals, and an ASD diagnosis expresses

itself in accordance to this (Buxbaum and Hof 1). This is further explained by the U.S. National Institute of Mental Health, who state that “autism is known as a ‘spectrum’ disorder because there is wide variation in the type and severity of symptoms people experience” (“Autism”). Thus, it is difficult to define the effects of ASD for a specific individual.

Nonetheless, it is possible to make certain generalisations of the symptoms connected to the diagnosis, based on what has been commonly identified in people who find themselves within the spectrum. For example, Vicki Bitsika and Christopher Sharpley describe that a person with ASD often has a limited understanding of social communication and interactions. This becomes noticeable as they tend to have difficulties to comprehend, as well as use, facial expressions, body language, gestures and intonations in speech (25). Hence, these propensities often cause the individual to misinterpret the reactions of others, and is thereby more likely to become subject of misunderstandings when navigating social grounds. Moreover, these limitations of social awareness are also what generally cause a person with ASD to show tendencies of having a literal understanding of written and spoken words (Bitsika and Sharpley 25). Consequently, these symptoms may lead individuals to fail to join in conversations or establish relationships with peers (Natl. Health Service, U.K., “Autism”).

Nevertheless, ASD does not only involve difficulties with social interaction, but it may also have an effect on a person’s behavioural patterns. This is something that the U.K National Health Service confirms as they describe that a person with ASD may display a hypersensitivity to certain lights, sounds, and unknown or stressful situations. Unfortunately, Bitsika and Sharpley continue, due to the limitations in comprehending the effects of their own and other people’s actions, individuals with ASD can exhibit intense reactions to aforementioned situations, which might be strongly unpleasant for them and their surroundings (25). Therefore, one coping strategy to mitigate this

overstimulation is to engage in fixed routines and activities. Further, this may manifest itself in a persistent preoccupation with tasks and objects of special interest (Natl. Health Service, U.K., “Autism”). Pursuantly, one way to describe the generic ASD behaviour is to be committed, determined and careful about exactness (Winter 10).

Further, Matt Winter states that autistic people tend to cherish their personal sphere, and try to avoid different forms of physical contact and collaborations, as that might be associated with certain frustration (15). Even so, this may become a basis for misunderstandings between neurodiverse and neurotypical individuals (Natl. Health Service, U.K., “Autism”). However, Douglas et al. explain that “Autism is a positive brain-based difference and part of the natural variance of life” (7). For this reason, it is important to note that an ASD diagnosis should not be seen as a negative influence on a personality, nor in all areas of life (Winter 10).

3 Disability Studies in Education and Neurodiversity

Since the emergence of disability studies, it has been divided into various subfields. One of these approaches is the educational one, commonly referred to as Disability Studies in Education (DSE) (Connor et al. 441). Moreover, Connor et al. identify that the main, and two-fold, aim of DSE is to deepen the societal understandings of disability and thereby make sure to sustain an inclusive educational environment and praxis (442). Accordingly, it is about making education and teaching reflect an awareness for the construction of disability as a social and cultural phenomenon.

However, when looking to the actual educational context, these ideas can be challenging to implement. When considering cognitive disabilities, such as ASD, an investigational report carried out by the Swedish National Agency for Education in 2009 shows that although neurodiversity has been a well-known issue in Education since the 1980s, the Swedish school still has some distance to reach the DSE aims of

creating an educational system that builds on collective equality and understanding for all (6). Due to previous lack of results, the issue of neurodiversity has seen an advancement of consideration in recent years in the Swedish educational context (Natl. Ag. for Ed. “The School and Asperger’s syndrome” 6). Thus, as explained by Douglas et al., the issue of raising awareness and acceptance for cognitive disabilities in educational and societal contexts, as well as to teach students how to establish healthy relationships, is seemingly more vital than ever (14). Thereof, it may be suggested that educational instances are a valuable means in the process to achieve the DSE ambition to create an inclusive society that is accepting towards disability.

As previously described by Goodley, one way to promote such awareness, and thereby combat prejudicial attitudes and structures regarding disability, is to question their existence and spread knowledge about the true notion of the concept (123). Although this is an important note to make when educating for the recognition of disability as a social and cultural construct, Douglas et al. state that mere awareness for the oppressional structures might not, however, promote durable nor actual acceptance (7). Hence, it is important to convey that neurodiversity, or any other impairment, is not something that should be taught to “tolerate”, ultimately it should be affirmed.

Thereof, Linda Ware suggests that it is equally vital for teachers to strive for empowerment about impairments and disability, since such an approach would bring the education past awareness, towards giving students true acknowledgement and understanding for disabled people (14). Correspondingly, the purpose of such teaching would be to actively work as to creating a society where everyone is seen for who they are instead of what is supposedly said about them in diagnostic terms (Ware 117-18). Based on this, it can be argued that education and teaching aiming towards achieving the DSE aspiration should supply equal amount of endorsement as awareness in order to combat subjective meanings of impairment and disability.

3.1 Educational Frameworks Commenting on Disability

The matter of disability is closely interconnected with the fundamental values of the Swedish curriculum for Upper Secondary School. Pursuantly, the curriculum states that all education (thus including all school subjects) should aspire to foster students who are compassionate and understanding towards other people, and who have a refined ability to empathise (Natl. Ag. for Ed. 4). Hence, this is part of the educational task to create consciousness and recognition for all sorts of people, including various forms of functional impairment, to prevent discrimination and degrading treatment from happening in school and in society. Further, the students should be provided with the ability to critically examine facts and relationships, in order to learn how to recognize harmful societal structures and practices (Natl. Ag. for Ed. “Curriculum” 9). Moreover, the curriculum explains that it is part of the School’s responsibility to make students acquire a sense of the democratic values, such as solidarity and respect for the equality and inviolability of all people, on which the Swedish society relies (Natl. Ag. for Ed. 4). This way the students will have been given the tools to properly orient themselves in a complex and rapidly changing contemporary reality (Natl. Ag. for Ed. “Curriculum” 5).

3.2 The Inclusion of Neurodiverse Literature in the EFL Classroom

As previously indicated, the responsibility to foster students who are inclusive and accepting towards neurodiversity, as well as any other types of functional impairment, is an integral part of the school’s educational responsibility. Yet, there is nowhere specified any definite methods that teachers should use to provide their students with said awareness for disability. Accordingly, the issue on how to manage this assignment depends on the individual teacher’s pedagogical knowledge and creativity.

However, it could be suggested that literary readings would be a favourable method to use when educating students about their personal roles in the process of

creating an inclusive society. As stated by Stuart Murry, it has been shown that neurodiverse fictional narratives tend to have a surprisingly strong effect on people's conception and understanding of autism (3-4). Thereby it is suggested that neurodiverse literature may be used to create a sensitivity towards recognizing the needs and perspective of others, as well as combat faulty conceptions of autism being something that needs to be cured, rather than accepted (Douglas et al. 7). In addition, Loftis describes that inclusion of literary perspectives on cognitive disabilities would not only provide a deeper understanding in neurotypical societal terms, but also for the neurodiverse community to understand itself in relation to it (15).

Yet, when teaching students about neurodiversity as a form of social and cultural construct, it is imperative to use literary representations that are self-determining and accurate (Murray 40, 211). The definition of accuracy in ASD literature concerns itself with how a novel presents information about the diagnosis. This is to say, that the information given about ASD corresponds with the commonly known generic symptoms of autism within the spectrum (Irwin et al. 7). For instance, Murray explains that ASD often is seen as an alien phenomenon to the greater public, and therefore, it is important that teachers consider the way in which the diagnosis is portrayed in the narratives that they choose (Murray 105). Likewise, Suzanne Keen suggests that a character's internal focalisation could play an important role when considering different types of literary representations, as such narratives have an influential effect on a reader's empathy (93) and possibly even their attitudes and understanding of a portrayed disability (91). Furthermore, Maria Nikolajeva describes that literature which annotates on societal and cultural practices and structures may be considered a highly valued epistemic tool when aiming to provide adolescents with strategies which may allow them to successfully navigate in a socially demanding contemporary society (3). Accordingly, this is something teachers may want to consider

when including neurodiverse perspectives in their teaching. This way, Nikolajeva adds, fictional realities may help students to acquire “the societal norms and . . . the kinds of relationships and behaviours any given society expects of its members” (31). Thus, educational readings of such literature may help adolescents to become the well-functioning democratic citizens which the curricular documents wishes them to be.

Moreover, when turning to the core content of English level 6, it is said that students should be given the opportunity to encounter complex subject areas that are related to their everyday life, such as values, attitudes and norms in different societal context (Natl. Ag. for Ed. “Syllabus” 7). Further, through attending English level 6, the students should develop an ability to understand how literary context is structured to portray implied meaning, attitudes, as well as different perspectives. Based on this, the generosity of core content of English level 6 opens up for students to learn, as well as express their thoughts and personal experiences about neurodiversity in relation to present day society (Natl. Ag. for Ed. “Syllabus” 7). Although the syllabus states that these issues should be addressed in the context of the English speaking world, it could be mentioned that neurodiversity is a widespread issue that applies to all societies, regardless of the language being spoken. Therefore, it is argued that the EFL classroom would indeed be an appropriate venue to educate students about the cultural and societal matters that surrounds disability.

4 The portrayal of disability in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

This analysis aims to investigate how *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* depicts an autistic narrator’s social and behavioural challenges in everyday life, and creates understanding for the notion of cognitive disability. This will be done with the intention to invigorate the idea of disability as a product of social and cultural

construct (Brueggemann et al. 372-73), to raise awareness for the prejudicial attitudes that surrounds disability (Goodley 123). Therefore, Christopher's interactive passages and interior monologue will mainly be analysed in relation to the social model, which aspires to transform the social status of disability by investigating hostile social attitudes and structures that have a disabling effect on the single individual (Barnes 43-44).

Moreover, even if the novel does not explicitly label Christopher with an ASD diagnosis, he still exhibits several of the generic symptoms of ASD (Loftis 124). Thereof, it is argued that the protagonist's first person narrative provides the reader with a chance to assume the perspective of a person on the autism spectrum, and thus possibly gain a deeper understanding of neurodiversity (Keen 91). Hence, Christopher becomes a valuable representative for neurodiversity in this literary analysis.

4.1 Social Interaction

Throughout Haddon's novel the reader is frequently presented with how Christopher's impairments affect his social relations and interactions. Already within the first pages the protagonist tells of one of his less fortunate encounters with a police officer.

Christopher has just been caught hugging his neighbour's diseased (and believed to be murdered) dog, Wellington, and police are called to the site to investigate what has happened. However, Christopher seems to have, what Bitsika and Sharpley refer to as, a limited ability to comprehend social situations and interaction in which he finds himself (25). This shows itself as Christopher answers some of the police officer's questions about why he was hugging the dog, and what he is doing at his neighbour's property:

I sat up [from holding the dog] and said, 'The dog is dead.'

'I'd got that far,' he said.

I said, 'I think someone killed the dog.' . . .

'And what, precisely, where you doing in the garden?' he asked.

‘I was holding the dog,’ I replied.

‘And why were you holding the dog?’ he asked.

This was a difficult question to answer . . . and I wanted to answer the question properly, but the policeman did not give me enough time to work out the correct answer. (Haddon 7)

From this quote, the reader understands that Christopher has a literal understanding of the police officer’s questions, which Bitsika and Sharpley identify as one of the generic symptoms of ASD (25). Therefore, he attempts to answer the questions in that same spirit, that is to say, as literal and exact as possible. Neither does Christopher seem to understand why the police officer is talking to him about this, as he himself knows that he did not do anything wrong. Yet, from the police officer’s point of view, he is questioning the first person who is found on the scene of the crime and who thereby might be one of the main suspects of who killed Wellington. Thus, this also becomes an indication of Christopher’s limited ability as an autistic narrator to read and understand the minds of others when navigating social grounds (Bitsika and Sharpley 25).

Consequently, this makes it difficult for him to understand the social context in which he finds himself, which in accordance to Bitsika and Sharpley, is one of the various limitations of social interaction that affects people who find themselves on the autism spectrum (25). Thereof, Christopher’s situation with the police officer indeed provides a complexity to the encounter between neurotypical and neurodiverse individuals.

However, as the police officer is not aware of the fact that Christopher’s reaction might be tied to a neurological diagnosis, he does not slow down his interrogation, instead he pushes him harder by saying “ ‘I am going to ask you once again...’ ” (Haddon 8). Accordingly, the reader understands that Christopher’s interactive difficulties are starting to frustrate the police officer, since he might be perceiving Christopher’s answers as disrespectful or evasive.

Hence, instead of attempting to understand why Christopher is reacting this way, and ask him about it, the police man reacts in a hostile manner and displays a somewhat prejudicial attitude towards what he does not directly recognize as normal. This situation could thereby be viewed in connection to what Goodley and Barton respectively point out as harmful consequences to the social construction of disability, where culturally built preconceptions cause an able-bodied surrounding to react with antipathy to atypical conduct (Goodley 129; Barton 7-8). Thereof, this situation serves as a good example of what Thomas refers to as how disability is something that first “comes into being when aspects of social . . . practice operate to disadvantage” for an affected individual, via the prejudicial attitudes of the surroundings (43). This is to say that in accordance to the social model, Christopher’s difficulties with social communication and interaction would not necessarily have become an issue unless his surroundings had not been taught to view it as such (Thomas 38).

Still, it could be argued that the police officer’s behaviour could be tied to the fact that he might not realize that Christopher is on the autism spectrum, as Ruggles Gere proclaims that people with non-physically noticeable impairments are more likely to be confronted with misjudgement and patronising behaviour from the neurotypical environment (58). Likewise, this could be linked to the possible fact that the police officer may lack education about neurodiversity, and thus how to both identify and respond to typical ASD behaviour. Pursuantly, this could in return be tied to what Loftis mentions as the neglect of neurodiverse perspectives in academic research, which indirectly has further strengthened the disregard of public knowledge about cognitive disabilities (14). However, it is also worth mentioning that ASD is a spectrum disorder, which means that “there is a wide variation in the type of severity of the symptoms people experience” and exhibit (Natl. Inst. of Mental Health, U.S., “Autism”). In consequence, it can be difficult for a neurodiverse surroundings to apprehend the signs

that an ASD individual might show of their diagnosis. Therefore, the police officer might simply be unaware of how his attitude negatively affects Christopher's neurodiverse behaviour.

In this sense, this situation also comments on the dual narrative layers of Haddon's novel, since a neurotypical reader might realise that the police officer is acting upon what he perceives as a truculent teenager, rather than Christopher's disability. Thereupon, the reader might even come to recognize themselves in the police officer's perspective more than they would Christopher's. Yet, seeing that the story is told from Christopher's first person narrative, the reader is simultaneously very much aware of Christopher's difficulties of understanding social codes as he multiple times explains that "[he] find[s] people confusing" (Haddon 19). Consequently, the reader might have developed empathy for Christopher, and experience the same discomfort about the situation that he does (Keen 93). With this in mind, it is proposed that Haddon intentionally tries to put the reader in the middle of the two perspectives in order to demonstrate that the likelihood of misinterpretation in social interaction is not solely tied to cognitive disabilities, rather, it is equally common for neurotypical individuals. In this respect Haddon's novel, in accordance to the social model, also illustrates the need to provide cognitive disabilities a greater amount of cultural and social attention in order to counteract the collective unawareness for neurodiversity (Fraser 29) in order to minimize the risk for misunderstandings that may arise between neurodiverse and neurotypical individuals (Ruggles Gere 58).

Although the police officer's behaviour in Haddon's novel could be blamed on the fact that he does not know about Christopher's presumed diagnosis, this is not always the case. Instead, Christopher also encounters this type of patronising behaviour by people who are aware of his social impairments, such as his father's friend, Rhodri. When Rhodri comes over he usually asks Christopher to solve different types of

mathematical problems since Christopher has an ingenuous knowledge and interest for numbers and mathematics to which he is strongly committed. Thus, this is additionally another aspect of Christopher's personality that Haddon uses to indicate his protagonist's ASD tendencies (Winter 10), while also commenting on how "Autism is a positive brain-based difference and part of the natural variance of life" (Douglas et al. 7), as the protagonist's mathematical proficiency is a strength, rather than a weakness. Yet, when Christopher asks Rhodri if he has given the correct answer or not, Rhodri responds: "I haven't got a bloody clue" and laughs (Haddon 84).

In other words, Christopher becomes marginalised as his limited comprehension of social codes (Bitsika and Sharpley 25) prevents him from understanding that Rhodri's questions have a hidden agenda of making fun of him. Hence, as stated by Barton, through this type of behaviour Rhodri devalues Christopher by questioning his social intelligence as he makes fun of him and his special interest (8). Likewise, Rhodri's actions could also be seen as a way to construct a difference between himself and Christopher's neurodiversity. Consequently, when looking to the social model of disability it is suggested that Rhodri labels Christopher as a disabled individual (Barton 8) and thereby, he contributes to constraining Christopher's, as well as other disabled people's, rights to self-determination by further denoting a dominant hegemony over the concept of being cognitively disabled (Thomas 38).

Unfortunately, the effects of Rhodri's behaviour do not pass Christopher by, as he describes: "I don't like it when Rhodri laughs at me. Rhodri laughs at me a lot" (Haddon 84). Accordingly, not only does Rhodri seem to be strongly affected by past ideas of disability referring to people as abnormal (Shakespeare 217), but he spreads this view to Christopher by setting up an attitudinal barrier between them (Thomas 38), just like the police officer does. However, the protagonist's impairment is not an issue for himself, but through Rhodri's attitudes, he learns that his surroundings might see it

as such. In accordance to Thomson, disability is a problem that can be found in the surroundings of an impairment, rather than in the impairment itself (2). Thereby, Rhodri's character creates one of those hostile social environments that Goodley when reciting the social model refers to that oppress disabled people (Goodley 22, 123), by implying that Christopher's special interest is something laughable.

Nonetheless, it could be argued that Rhodri does not have any intention to devalue Christopher, rather, the barrier between them could be due to Christopher's difficulties to interpret Rhodri's tone of voice and facial expression as he tries (Bitsika and Sharpley 25), as Christopher's father puts it, to "be[ing] friendly" (Haddon 84). Thereupon, it is notable that the only perspective that the reader is presented with is Christopher's internal focalization. Therefore, however true the story is to Christopher himself, he might still come across as an unreliable narrator in that the reader does not get to see the situation from another character's (such as Rhodri or the police officer) point of view. Hence, the reader cannot be sure about what Rhodri's intentions actually were with this comment. For this reason the protagonist could also be considered a restricted narrator in that he has a limited narrative ability due to the fact that his ASD tendencies make it difficult for him to fully comprehend certain aspects of ordinary social communication and interaction (Bitsika and Sharpley 25). Still, with this section Haddon nevertheless manages to illustrate the complexity of the misunderstandings and miscommunications that can appear in the social interactions between neurotypical and neurodiverse people in a persuasive manner (Bitsika and Sharpley 25). Thereby could Christopher's first person narrative simultaneously be considered valuable, as it provides a profound insight in the world of a neurodiverse character.

Yet another notable aspect with Christopher's encounter with Rhodri is Haddon's depiction of his father's reaction to it, where instead of intervening, the father plays along with Rhodri's ridicule and defends his behaviour. Accordingly, this could

be interpreted as if the father's own ideas about disability in actuality are strongly influenced by the medical model, that is to say the ideas of disability being a state in need for rehabilitation in order to qualify into the able-bodied society (Drake 148). Thereof, he does not see a fault in Rhodri's actions as he himself might consider his son to have a need of learning to adapt to the neurotypical surroundings. Consequently, the father finds it easier to ignore Christopher's feelings as he represents the ridicule as a teaching opportunity for Christopher to take note from and toughen up. This way Haddon further points to what Barton states about the profound rooting of the hegemonic attitudes about disability that are connected the medical model (6).

However, Shakespeare as a social model advocate states that since disability is an issue of cultural and social construct, an able-bodied surrounding carries a greater and collective responsibility to unshackle structures that perpetuate power asymmetry for disabled individuals (215). With this in mind it could be said that even if Rhodri's attitude along with the father's passiveness might be unintentional and unconscious, they still diminish the protagonist, and thereby label him as other (Goodley 129). Thereof, they yet constitute active parts in the enforcement of the harmful social and cultural hegemony that lies over the concept of being disabled (Barton 6).

Although so far mainly the protagonist's confrontations and confusion have been mentioned, this is luckily enough not always the case. For instance, Christopher encounters a more inclusive and understanding attitude in his special needs mentor, Siobhan. As aforementioned, Christopher's presumed ASD diagnosis limits his understanding of social interaction and how to properly communicate with people around him (Natl. Inst. of Mental Health U.S., "Autism"). Therefore, Siobhan's role in Christopher's educational life is to help him interpret different types of situations that he comes across, and teach him about socially accepted codes, norms and behaviour that Nikolajeva states all contemporary societies look for in its members (31). Hence,

Siobhan's meaningful function as a moral counsellor is further clarified as the protagonist tells the reader "she once said, 'If you want to go on the swings and there are already people on the swings, you must never push them off. You must ask them if you can have a go. And then you must wait until they have finished.' " (Haddon 39). Accordingly, Siobhan guides Christopher as he navigates the social grounds that he has difficulty to grasp, and thus socializing him into the democratic citizenship in which the English Secondary school aims to foster their students (Department for Education 82).

However, it might still be arguable as to whether Siobhan's function as a special education mentor could be considered helpful to Christopher or not, as her job often revolves around telling the protagonist what he can and cannot say or do if he wants to be socially accepted. In other words, Siobhan's primary aim could be interpreted as to rehabilitate Christopher from his autistic tendencies so that he fits into an able-bodied, and thereby neurotypical, reality (Drake 148). In this sense, Siobhan's character becomes dubious, as such an objective rather represents the idea of disability in accordance to the medical model, where disabled people is considered deficit (Thomas 38), and in need of treatment for their impairments (Drake 148).

Thereupon, Haddon's ability to act for a re-definition of the concept of disability could be criticized, since the inclusion of Siobhan's character alternatively insinuates that autistic individuals are only capable of taking on the world if they are guided by a neurotypical mentor. Hence, such ideas would rather strengthen the construct of able-bodied people viewing disability as a deprivation for the single individual (Shakespeare 217) and thus uphold a hegemonic discourse over the notion of being disabled.

Therefore, it might be suggested that Siobhan's character points to a demeaning of the social status of disability, and thereby works against the processes of the social model that seek to further empower the rights of disabled people (Barnes et al. 2).

Accordingly, it could be argued that ideas similar to those represented in the medical

model serve no rightful place in a contemporary society that has strived towards the emancipation of the concept of disability since the 1960s (Barnes et al. 2).

Yet, it is worth mentioning that Christopher himself appreciates having Siobhan in his life, as he explains that “Siobhan understands. When she tells me not to do something she tells me exactly what it is I am not allowed to do. And I like this” (Haddon 39). In other words, Haddon’s portrayal of Christopher is rather that he perceives Siobhan as one of the people in his immediate surroundings that do not confuse him, hence, she is the person he most often turns to when he feels troubled (Haddon 68, 94). Pursuantly, it could be argued that the function of a special needs mentor is not about devaluing neurodiverse people’s rights to be who they are, but finding ways to defuse the volatility that may ensue from the specific kinds of miscommunication and confusion that ASD causes.

In accordance to Buxbaum and Hof, an ASD diagnosis is a highly individual cognitive disorder (1), and therefore, there are no definite rights or wrongs to whether an autistic student should have a special needs mentor or not. In Haddon’s Christopher’s case, it rather seems as if he finds his mentor as a help and support that makes him feel comfortable with his everyday life. This becomes clear as Christopher describes that when “I told Siobhan that father had told me I couldn’t do any more detecting . . . she said it didn’t matter . . . and that I should be very proud” (Haddon 67). Thus, Siobhan does not constitute a hinder for the protagonist to express himself, instead, she is there to act as a personal advisor for him, which he himself also might feel the need of.

With this in mind it could be argued that the function of Siobhan’s character in Haddon’s novel is to enrich Christopher’s life rather than limiting it. Accordingly, Siobhan operates to empower the protagonist instead of healing him from his ASD tendencies. Moreover, as Goodley states that one step in the direction of achieving emancipation for disabled people is to listen to their voices in order to gain knowledge

about their needs and view of themselves (123), it could be claimed that it is neurodiverse people themselves that are to decide what limits or helps them as they navigate their neurotypical surroundings.

4.2 Behavioural Impairments

Just as the social interactions affect the protagonist's encounters with the social world, so does his behavioural impairments, which, according to the U.K National Health Service, might have an influential effect on autistic people's relationships with the neurotypical world. However, it is not only the human factor that has a strengthening effect on the creation of disabling environments, but also the physical environment that surrounds Christopher. Accordingly, this is also commented on by Shakespeare, who in accordance to the social model explains that aspects of societal structure, such as public transport, can be a direct cause of creating a disabling environment (217). This becomes especially evident as Christopher enters a train station, where he describes that:

it made me feel giddy and sick because there were lots of people walking into and out of the tunnel and it was already echoey and there was only one way to go and that was down the tunnel, and it smelled like toilets and cigarettes. So I stood against the wall and held onto the edge of a sign . . . to make sure that I didn't fall over and go into a crouch on the ground. (Haddon 180)

Hence, this quote indicates that Christopher has an oversensitivity towards sounds, as well as unfamiliar and stressful situations, which the U.K National Health Service confirm to be one of the many symptoms that an individual with ASD might display.

Consequently, this hypersensitivity causes Christopher to have a forceful reaction to what a neurotypical individual might refer to as a rather typical public transport setting. The noise and strong smells directly disable him psychologically as well as physically, and prevent him from getting to his train in a dignified manner.

Pursuantly, the protagonist's thorough description of how the world might be perceived from an autistic point of view brings to mind Brueggemann et al.'s discussion about the difference between impairment and disability. This is to say, that an "impairment is a physical difference" in for example brain functionality, but having a disability is something else as that rather revolves around what society attribute to that impairment (Brueggemann et al. 372-73). Accordingly, Haddon demonstrates how inaccessible, and thus physically excluding, public settings can be to neurodiverse individuals (Thomas 38), and how strongly their ASD diagnosis may affect their ability to properly operate colloquial aspects of life (Natl. Inst. of Mental Health, U.S., "Autism").

Moreover, in accordance with Barton, although noise and a fast-paced environment make out the reality of contemporary society, Christopher's visit to the train station yet demonstrates how societal structures might come to limit and demean a disabled individual on the grounds of their impairment (9-10). Seeing that it could be argued that in a society that works towards the inclusiveness for all, there would not be a difference between neurotypical and neurodiverse individuals as they enter a train station. Therefore, Goodley states that it is imperative to start listening to the voices of impairment and let them be an integrated part in the recreation of a society that is sustainable for all, in order to even begin to redeem the social structures that delimits neurodiverse people (123). However, when considering the protagonist's description of a public transport setting, it is clear that the Western Society still has a long way to go before the dominant discourse that that infringes on disabled people's freedom of movement (Thomas 38) has been properly undermined.

Furthermore, when again looking to Christopher's previously described first encounter with a police officer, the situation also illustrates an example of the complexity of the neurodiverse behaviour in relation to neurotypicality. As the police officer becomes increasingly frustrated, he intensifies his pressure on Christopher to

answer his numerous questions fast and directly. Since the protagonist's presumed ASD diagnosis limits his understanding of the motives behind other people's actions (Bitsika and Sharpley 25), the interrogation frustrates Christopher as he is unable to unriddle the police officer's intentions. Therefore, this stressful situation causes Christopher to "roll[ed] back into the lawn and press[ed] [his] . . . forehead into the ground again and [make] the noise that Father calls groaning" (Haddon 8). Accordingly, this is one of the coping strategies that Christopher uses "when there is too much information coming into [his] head from the outside world" (Haddon 8). That is to say, the protagonist uses this strategy to soothe his hypersensitivity and regain a feeling of being safe. This is also something that U.K National Health Service identify as a generic ASD behaviour. As a result, this quotation adds to the reader's belief that Christopher in one way or another finds himself on the autism spectrum.

In addition, with this explanation the narrator informs the reader about why he acts the way he does and how this reaction is logical and helpful to him. Consequently, by taking part of Christopher's perspective Haddon's novel builds a dialogic bridge between the neurodiverse and the neurotypical mind, which according to Goodley is one of the methods to use in order to challenge the harmful and dominating hegemonies that creates prejudicial and marginalising attitudes about impairments and disability (123). Thus, it can be argued that Christopher's eloquence and exactitude when telling his story contribute to the emancipation of the construction of disability. Furthermore, since Winter ascribes the generic ASD behaviour with a carefulness about exactness, it also demonstrates to the reader how an ASD diagnosis should not be seen as a negative aspect of an individual's personality, or life situation (10).

Yet, as Bitsika and Sharpley explain that the reactions and coping strategies tied to hypersensitivity might come to upset the neurotypical surroundings (25), this is also the case in Haddon's novel, as Christopher tells the reader that "the policeman took a

hold of my arm and lifted me onto my feet” (Haddon 8). In other words, the police officer becomes so aggravated with Christopher’s behaviour that he uses constraint to re-gain control over, what he seems to recognize as a juvenile resistance. Pursuantly, the police officer manifests a view of disability as something deviant in accordance to the medical model (Thomas 38), as he uses Christopher’s coping strategies against him, to legitimise his own behaviour (Barton 7). Thereby, he unconsciously works to maintain the hegemonic social structures that stigmatize neurodiverse individuals (Thomas 38).

Correspondingly, this situation vividly poses as an example of how neurodiversity as an invisible disability entails a greater risk of encountering misjudgement from neurotypical individuals (Ruggles Gere 58). Thereby, in accordance to Shakespeare, the police officer’s actions contribute to nourish past ideas of disability referring to abnormality (217). Unfortunately this type of misjudgement about neurotypicality is not only a fictional issue. According to a report made by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), a similar situation like the one in Haddon’s story arose in Sweden in 2018, where a young man with Down’s syndrome was shot to death by Swedish police, as they thought he was pointing a gun at them. However, as it later turned out, the boy had merely been larking with a toy pistol as he, supposedly, had not understood the severity in the situation (BBC). Nevertheless, it could be suggested that the misunderstanding between the two parties could have been avoided if education about various forms of neurodiversity had been a more widespread issue in Western society. Thus, Haddon’s novel indeed contributes to the demonstration of the need of greater recognition of invisible impairments in society, in order for neurodiversity to gain greater social awareness and acceptance (Connor et al. 450).

Even if Haddon’s novel displays how a neurotypical society that is widely oblivious of the symptoms of ASD might come to affect a neurodiverse individual, it also comments on the kinds of relationships that might arise between neurotypical and

neurodiverse family members. When anew looking to the protagonist and his father, they seem to share a healthy family bond, yet, there are certain indicators that point to the opposite. For instance, as Christopher finds out that Wellington (the neighbour's dog) has died, he is immediately intrigued to find out who the murderer is. This is, however, not something that his father approves of, and therefore he tells Christopher "‘You are not to go asking anyone about who killed that bloody dog.’ . . . ‘You are to stop this ridiculous bloody detective game right now’." (Haddon 64). Accordingly, the father has shouldered the role as a supervisor to his son, and has thereby excluded Christopher from the possibility to decide what he is to do with his life.

Meanwhile, it could be argued that a parent should act as a supervisor to their children, but it is also important to remember that there is a limit when parental supervision turns into parental control. In this instance, the father's behaviour could be seen as a foreshadowing of how a parent can also over-step those boundaries, which is what happens later in the novel. In addition, as Shakespeare suggests that society in many ways are constructed in accordance to a neurotypical reality (217), it is possible to consider the chance that parents to neurodiverse children are less prone to allow their children to become independent early as they fear that their children might suffer from discrimination. Consequently, these parents might be more likely to be overly vigilant of their children. Subsequently, this could also be the case for Christopher's father.

Yet, according to Barton, this type of over-protective behaviour does not do neurodiverse individuals any good (8). Rather, it builds to the creation of a patronising view of themselves as ignorant others that are incapable of self-determination (Goodley 129). In other words, Christopher to some extent becomes disabled by his own father's behaviour towards him, and in consequence, this type of parental control might be considered to forge previous views of disability as something invalid (Shakespeare 217). Subsequently, it could be claimed that this parental technique serves to betray

neurodiverse children, instead of shielding them from a neurotypical reality. Hence, through presenting the reader with the relationship between Christopher and his father, Haddon in accordance to the social model demonstrates how restrictive behaviour from surrounding neurotypical family members comes to disable and oppress single neurodiverse individuals (Thomas 43).

On the other hand, as stated by Winter, one aspect of the generic ASD behaviour is to be strongly committed and determined when setting their mind to something (10). Likewise, this is one of the autistic traits that Haddon's protagonist displays as he decides to ignore his father's request by standing up for himself and continuing his investigation for the killer. Nevertheless, it does not take long until his father learns that Christopher has defied him. Thereof, the two start to argue and the father bursts out "Holy fucking Jesus, Christopher. How stupid are you?" . . . 'What the fuck did I tell you . . . ?'"(Haddon 102). Pursuantly, as the father realises that he has lost control over his son, he also loses his ability to control himself as he in desperation further manifest his patronising view of Christopher's disability and his yearning for the truth by using a terminology (Shakespeare 217) that questions his intelligence (Barton 8).

Moreover, in this attempt of regaining the lost authority he grabs a tight hold of Christopher's arm in order to keep the grip that he has established over his son's life³. Thus, this scene might come to further influence the reader's view of the relationship between Christopher and his father as characterized by the hegemonic attitudes of the medical model where disability is seen as a burden to those affected by it (Shakespeare 217). Thereupon, there is a risk that the reader's view of Christopher will be influenced of Haddon's portrayal of the father's dominant discourse of ableism.

³ In the latter part of the novel the reader is informed that Christopher's father is Wellington's (the dog) murderer, and this fact could consequently be the reason behind his behaviour. Nevertheless, it is argued that this does not justify the physical and psychological misconduct to which he exposes Christopher.

However, Haddon's Christopher strongly disapproves of any type of physical contact. Accordingly, this fright of touch constitutes yet another example on how a reader might presume that Christopher is on the autism spectrum since Winter identifies this type of preservation of personal sphere as one of the generic symptoms connected to ASD behaviour (15). Consequently, his father's grabbing has a negative effect on Christopher as his hypersensitivity to touch is associated with great frustration for him. This becomes noticeable as Christopher himself describes that "Father had never grabbed a hold of me like that before. . . . So I was very surprised when he grabbed me. I don't like it when people grab me and I don't like being surprised either. So I hit him." (Haddon 103). Thereupon, the stressful situation and over-stimuli to the father's touch trigger a violent response as the protagonist is unable to cope with the loss of control that it entails (Bitsika and Sharpley 25).

Based on this, and with the previously mentioned risk of readers assimilating the father's hegemonic view of disability in mind, it is argued that due to the fact the reader follows Christopher's internal focalisation of the situation, they might be more likely to take on the protagonist's point of view. This is also something that Keen comments on as she explains that a character's internal narrative perspective has a significant effect in prompting reader's empathy (93) and so possibly their understanding of a disability (91). Hence, it is again claimed that the implied author's narratological technique might provoke the reader to feel empathy with him, and thus rather come to criticize the father's behaviour instead of appropriating his point of view.

Additionally, as Christopher fights off his father it could be argued that he also defends his right to self-determination, that is to say, his personal right to decide what he wants to do and what not, as well as who touches him and in what way. In other words, he fights off the aforementioned delimiting structures and attitudes inspired by the medical model that his father has put around him to limit his possibilities to thrive as

an independent individual (Thomas 38). With all things considered Haddon presents a representative description of Goodley's discussion of the importance to challenge disabling hegemonies, in order for neurodiverse individuals to achieve social emancipation and spread knowledge about disability (123). In summation, Haddon's novel, with its genuine portrayal of the social situations and communication failures that may arise between neurotypical and neurodiverse people, grants its reader a greater awareness of the affinity between the societal processes surrounding cognitive disability and the creation of disabling environments in current day societies.

5 The use of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* in the EFL classroom

This pedagogical analysis will present a discussion about how *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* could be approached in the EFL classroom. As this essay concerns itself with investigating how disability is a concept of cultural and social construct, these pedagogical implications aim to present how teachers may work to confront faulty and degrading conceptions of cognitive disabilities, and provide their students with a sense for what ASD actually imposes. This will be done through an application of the theoretical perspective of Disability Studies in Education, with additional support from the syllabus for English level 6 and the curriculum for the Swedish Upper Secondary School.

In addition, as Murray puts forth that the vast majority does not have a clear idea of what ASD entails in actuality, he argues that it is of great significance to consider how the diagnosis is portrayed in literary representations (105). Therefore, in order to grant students with an empowering, instead of depriving, view of autism it is important to present them with literary perspectives where ASD is understood on its own premises, and thereby surround itself by a certain measure of accurate and self-determining content (Murray 40, 211). Since it may be of interest for in-service teachers

to know to what extent a neurodiverse novel like *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* address these inquiries, this pedagogical analysis will also provide two separate sections where the matters of accuracy and self-determination in Haddon's novel are discussed. Thus, the previous order of the analytical aspects presented in the preceding literary analysis has been discarded for the benefit of the reflection to this educational requisite.

5.1 The power of literary portrayals of ASD

The Swedish curriculum for the Upper Secondary school meticulously advocates for the significance of all education aiming towards fostering students who are inclusive and compassionate to all sorts of people and different types of functional impairments, such as cognitive disabilities (4). Moreover, this is also commented on by Connor et al., who state that it is imperative to broaden the public knowledge about neurodiversity in order to create a more accepting and understanding society at large (442, 450). Thereby, in conjunction with the fact that neurodiversity is an issue of all contemporary societies (even those of the English speaking world), it is argued that the EFL classroom is as good a venue as any to educate students about neurodiversity and the cultural and social matters that surrounds it. However, the curriculum does not present any preferable methods for how teachers should provide their students with such fundamental knowledge and values. Nonetheless, Nikolajeva suggests that teachers could present their students with literature that comments on cultural and societal processes that are recognizable in the students' everyday life, in order to realize teaching that focuses on broadening their inclusiveness and abilities of mutual understanding (3).

Since Haddon's young adult novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* revolves around how neurodiverse people may be addressed by a normatively neurotypical contemporary British society, it does indeed comment on the societal and cultural practices to which Nikolajeva refers (3). Therefore, the novel may be of good

use for teachers who want to educate their students about how disability is something that emerges as a consequence of social conventions that “operate to disadvantage and exclusion” (Thomas 43). Likewise, the protagonist’s detailed descriptions of how the world around him make his neurological impairments into limitations helps to contextualize his point of view to the students. Pursuantly, Haddon’s Christopher takes on a social model perspective as he prefer to look on how these surroundings create a disabling environment for him (Barnes 43-44). Hence, the first person narration might guide students who are foreign to neurodiversity, as well as the social construction of disability, to familiarize themselves with the concepts (Keen 91-93). On this account Haddon’s novel may prompt students to acquire a better understanding for how attitudes concerning disability are created, and upheld by the collective disregard for what disability actually entails in a contemporary society.

Based on this it is implied that Haddon’s novel could be used as a point of departure in literary discussions that aim to analyse how societal aspects, such as other people’s attitudes and public transport, affect and disable Christopher in his everyday life. This way the students may even gain a better understanding of how they themselves could behave in order to facilitate the lives for autistic people they encounter in school, on the bus station, or at home. Consequently, by reading and analysing Haddon’s novel in the EFL classroom the students would be invited to practice their critical thinking and ability to examine harmful societal structures and practices, which may also help them to become more inclusive, respectful and compassionate towards other people (Natl. Ag. for Ed. 9). This is also supported by Goodley, who states that this way of tackling a neurodiverse text would be a constructive method to use when aiming to confront disabling hegemonic structures (123).

With this in mind, by presenting the students with a neurodiverse literary perspective, the teacher might provide his/her students with strategies that may allow

them to prevent discriminating treatment from happening in school and in society in general, as is one the main fostering aspirations of the Swedish curriculum (Natl. Ag. for Ed. 4). Thus, Haddon's novel could be of such character that Nikolajeva points out to be an epistemic tool for teachers who aim to provide their student's with strategies which may help them to successfully navigate societal grounds (3), in relation to neurodiversity and neurotypicality. This is also supported by Loftis who states that reading neurodiverse fiction, such as *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, may provide readers with a deeper understanding of cognitive disabilities, as well as for their own part in creating a more inclusive societal environment for all (15).

Likewise, by examining Christopher's social confrontations, and talking about how and why they arise, the readings of Haddon's novel may additionally be an opportunity for neurodiverse students to understand themselves in relation to the neurotypical society that surrounds them (Loftis 15). This way, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* could prompt teaching on two levels. The first being to broaden the awareness and respect for neurodiversity, and the second to broaden the students' abilities to acquire "the societal norms and . . . the kinds of relationships and behaviours any given society expects of its members" (Nikolajeva 31). This is to say, that through reading the novel with this focus, the students would be provided with the chance to encounter and discuss abstract societal aspects, such as values, attitudes and norms that surrounds them in their everyday life (Natl. Ag. for Ed. "Syllabus" 7). It is thereby argued that by analysing the implications of interactive norms found in Christopher's social confrontations, Haddon's novel may teach students, neurodiverse as well as neurotypical, how to successfully create healthy relationships with people around them and becoming more well-functioning democratic citizens (Natl. Ag. for Ed. "Curriculum" 4). This may also be of great importance for the quality of life from a

neurodiverse point of view, as students with ASD often struggle to establish mutual contacts with their peers (Natl. Health Service U.K., “Autism”).

Still, it is important to note that teachers can never know if or how their students will react to the literary content they are presented to. For instance, the British author, Aidan Chambers, explains “that all new reading depends on previous experience” (155). This means that although teachers may go to great lengths to provide their students with societal knowledge through literary readings, the students may still be strongly affected by their own previous perceptions and ideas of that literary perspective. Accordingly, this is significant for teachers to consider when presenting students to Haddon’s neurodiverse novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, as there is a high chance that students might have their own stereotypical views of cognitive impairments. This is also commented on by Murray, who states that since the greater public often perceives neurodiversity as a rather alien phenomena due to the general negligent that concerns the concept (105), it can be assumed that the majority of students in an EFL classroom have a similar point of departure. Therefore, it is vital that the literary representations of ASD relies on self-determination and accurate descriptions of the diagnosis that generate awareness and acceptance (Murray 40, 211), in order to avoid nourish faulty conceptions of autism as an illness that needs to be cured (Douglas et al. 7). Yet, in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* this could be considered a somewhat ambiguous issue. For this reason the matters of accuracy and self-determination in Haddon’s novel will be further discussed in the following sections.

5.1.1 Accurate representations of ASD

When examining the matter of accuracy in literary representations of autism, Irwin et al. claim that the most significant indicator is that the portrayal of ASD coincides with known general symptoms that can be found within the autism spectrum (7). Thus, when looking to the portrayal of ASD in Haddon’s novel, although the diagnosis is never

explicitly accounted for, Christopher in many ways displays rather typical autistic traits such as hypersensitivity to stress, touch, noise and smells (Natl. Health Service, U.K., “Autism”). Furthermore, as has been previously discussed, the protagonist also shows tendencies of having limited capacity to comprehend social interaction as it often leads him to confusion and different types of misunderstandings (Bitsika and Sharpley 25).

In other words, Christopher’s presumed ASD diagnosis is by and large portrayed in accordance what Bitsika and Sharpley, as well as the U.K National Institute of Mental Health, identify as the generic symptoms of ASD. With this in mind *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* in many ways correspond with what Irwin et al. identify as an accurate representation of autism (7), and therefore it is argued that the novel indeed presents students with authentic descriptions of what life might be like from a neurodiverse point of view.

Consequently, it might be claimed that Haddon’s novel would not lead to the fostering of faulty conceptions of ASD. Instead, as the novel present students with Christopher’s thorough descriptions of how he perceives the world, it may provide the students with an alternative view of neurodiversity to what they have previously assumed (Keen 91). This way *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* could be used as base for students to question why they have had a certain view of disability, and how these ideas have been created, which may help them in the process to fight such prejudicial views and structures in the future (Goodley 123). Thereby it is argued that by reading *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* students may be more prone to develop a greater acceptance and awareness for the true notion of cognitive disability in relation to ableism, as they take part of the protagonist’s journey in a socially dependent neurotypical society (Keen 91).

However, Haddon’s Christopher in many ways resembles what is commonly referred to as an autistic savant, which means that he is highly proficient within a

subject area (in his case mathematics) which stands as a contrast to his ASD tendencies (Treffert 1351). Yet, seeing that ASD is a spectrum disorder, other people with autism might not exhibit the exact same skills, nor difficulties, as Christopher (U.S. Natl. Inst. of Mental Health, “Autism”). Thereof, in order not to risk distributing a stereotypical view of autism and fully educate students about the multiplicity of an ASD diagnosis, it is important that teachers who choose to use *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* inform their students that Christopher merely presents one representation of autism. Nonetheless, this does not make Haddon’s novel an inaccurate depiction of the diagnosis, rather, it is an accurate and realistic description of how ASD expresses itself in relation to a person’s individuality. By informing students about the variety and individuality of ASD, teachers simultaneously take a step in the right direction to reach the DSE ambition to create a sustaining and all-embracing educational practice, while increasing students’ general knowledge of cognitive disabilities (Connor et al. 442). This way teachers might contribute to further the emancipation and recognition of disabled people in current day neurotypical societies.

Moreover, the discussion concerning accurate representations of ASD might also be implemented in the actuality of the students’ learning in the EFL classroom. For instance, it is proposed that the students analyse *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* in relation to what Irwin et al.’s definition of accuracy (7) in order to evaluate to what extent they found Haddon’s novel to provide them with an accurate description of ASD or not. This type of analysis would thus give the students the opportunity to become deeply involved in how to recognize a sample of the generic symptoms of autism, and how an ASD diagnosis may express itself in relation to a neurotypical societal practice. It is thereby implied that an accuracy analysis of Haddon’s novel may grant the students with a degree of sensitivity towards

distinguishing neurodiverse tendencies in their everyday life, and recognizing the perspectives and needs of others (Douglas et al. 7).

Additionally, in this evaluative analysis the teacher would also invite the students to compare Haddon's presentation of ASD to their personal previous knowledge of neurodiversity, as well as analyse what aspects around Christopher could be identified as contributing to the creation of a disabling environment. Pursuantly, the students may also be provided with the chance to communicate their own thoughts and experiences of literary content in relation to present day society, as is part of the core content in the syllabus for English level 6 (Natl. Ag. for Ed. "Syllabus" 7). By thus allowing the students to become personally involved in Haddon's novel, it is suggested that the teacher may build to the chance that the students will appropriate the neurodiverse perspective and learn from their readings of Haddon's novel. Accordingly, with all things considered, it is argued that the inclusion of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* in an EFL classroom might be a profitable start to a process that aims to strengthen students' empathy and recognition towards all sorts of people, which in turn may guide them into becoming the democratic citizens that the curricular documents aspires them to be (Natl. Ag. for Ed. "Curriculum" 4).

5.1.2 The Reflection of Self-determination

As Murray states that fiction portraying cognitive disabilities tend to have a strong influential impact on people's impression of ASD (3), it is important that such narratives mediate that neurodiversity is something that should be affirmed, rather than tolerated. Likewise, this is specifically relevant in the Swedish educational context as a report from 2009, conducted by the Swedish National Agency for Education, shows that the Swedish school has failed to provide the issue of neurodiversity the assiduity and endorsement that is needed to forge an educational system that builds on collective equality and recognition (Natl. Ag. for Ed. "The School and Asperger's syndrome" 6).

Seeing that the school is a place where all people with various backgrounds and identities come to meet (Natl. Ag. for Ed. “Curriculum” 4), Douglas et al. state that the need to provide students with awareness and acceptance for neurodiversity is more significant than ever before (14). Thereof, it is argued that the aspect of empowerment is of great significance when aspiring to make education counteract prejudiced notions and attitudes of neurological disabilities, such as autism (Ware 14).

However, when considering whether or not *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* presents its readers with an empowering view of Christopher’s presumed autism, it could be identified as a matter of perspective. For example, by presenting a plot where the actions and attitudes of a neurodiverse child’s father might be perceived to strengthen views of disability as something peculiar (Goodley 129), it could be implied that Haddon fails to present an all self-determining view of cognitive disabilities. Consequently, these aspects could come to affect the students’ view of neurodiversity in a negative way as they might identify with the father’s prejudicial and overprotecting neurotypical point of view. Likewise, Haddon’s inclusion of Siobhan’s character may also come to imply to students that Christopher as a neurodiverse protagonist is in need of a special needs mentor in order to function properly in society, which may not be true for everyone who finds themselves on the autism spectrum (Buxbaum and Hof 1). In addition, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* often presents how Christopher’s impairments put him in situations where he becomes subject to misjudgement, which could further add to the students’ possible appropriation to believe that disability is a burden for affected individuals.

Based on this it would seem as if *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* might however mediate awareness for what it may be like for a person to find themselves in a neurotypical environment, seeing that it does portray how harmful societal structures may come to limit a disabled individual (Thomas 38). Yet, due to the

lack of self-determining material, Douglas et al. state that the novel may not promote actual nor durable acceptance for neurodiversity (7). From this point of view Haddon's novel would only fulfil a part of the teacher's educational task to provide students with acknowledgement towards neurodiversity (Natl. Ag. for Ed. "Curriculum" 4)

Nevertheless, when looking to the neurodiverse protagonist's point of view, the portrayal of disability slightly differs. Rather, by reading Christopher's first person narrative the students may realize how he is very much aware of his social and behavioural limitations, but he does not let them stand in his way to do what he wants. Instead Christopher's ASD tendencies of being strongly committed to his task are what makes him stand above his father's disabling overprotection. In other words, Christopher is the one who is responsible for his own emancipation from his disability, thanks to his ASD related impairments. Hence, this would indicate to students that Haddon's novel does in fact present a self-determining view of disability. Moreover, seeing that Keen suggests that narratives with an internal focalisation might have a significant effect on a reader's empathy and familiarization with a certain perspective (91-93), it could be argued that the students would be as prone to appropriate Christopher's more empowering perspective on disability, as they would be the father's.

Still, Ware states that it is of great importance that teachers bring their teaching about neurodiversity past awareness and faulty conceptions of mere tolerance, and strive towards providing their students with true recognition and understanding for cognitive disability (14) in order to contribute to the creation a society where impairments would not define an individual (117-18). In other words, it is about taking teaching one step further in mediating that diversity is "part of the natural variance of life" (Douglas et al. 7). Therefore, it may be argued that it is vital that teachers who decide to use Haddon's novel with the purpose to challenge their students' stereotypical views of disability consider in what way they could negotiate this implication.

According to Connor et al., one evocative method that teachers could use to achieve this aspiration is to make their teaching reflect an awareness for the construction of disability as cultural and social phenomena (442). When considering Haddon's novel it is therefore suggested that teachers invite their students to examine the aforementioned bias between Christopher's and the father's perspective on disabilities to discuss the consequence of implied meaning in literary content and in what ways that would affect the reader (Natl. Ag. for Ed. "Syllabus" 7). In such literary discussions, the students would be asked to think about what type of picture Haddon's novel paints of cognitive disabilities and how this is noticeable, which might encourage the students to explore what the novel supposedly says about contemporary society.

Hence, it is suggested that teachers present their students to what Beach et al. refer to as a critical inquiry approach, as that may allow students to explore "questions about the texts we teach in relation to the communities and social . . . contexts within which teaching" occurs (7). This way the teacher would help the students to investigate what certain views of disability could imply and how they may come to express themselves. Consequently, by critically investigating the different aspects of perspective taking in a literary piece like *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* teachers may provide their students with a better understanding for the socially and culturally built construct of disability.

Subsequently, it is stated that Haddon's novel could generate both potential insights and unintended pitfalls when used in purpose to grant the students with a better understanding for neurodiversity and neurotypicality in the EFL classroom. Although that the aspect of empowerment and accuracy may be seen as ambiguous issues in Haddon's novel, they should not merely be considered as a problematic. Rather, the multi-layeredness of the novel presents the students with authentic illustration of how complex the issue of neurodiversity may be in relation to the perspectives of

neurotypical surroundings (Thomas 43). Thereof, it is about the teacher recognizing the novel's need of being contextualized and analysed in carefully designed tasks in order to provide students with a positive and authentic perspective on cognitive disabilities. Pursuantly, it is implied that *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* would indeed have the power to provide students with equal amount of endorsement as awareness for the concept of disability, in conjunction with an enabling teacher.

6 Conclusion

The aim of this essay has been to analyse how the internal focalisation of the presumably autistic protagonist in Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* depicts, as well as raises awareness and understanding, for neurodiversity in relation to a normatively neurotypical society as a result of behavioural and interactional impairments related to ASD. To bring the discussion forward a critical lens of Disability Studies has been applied, known as the social model of disability, to scrutinize how disability may be seen as a product of cultural and social construct. Along these lines, this essay has also investigated whether *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* would be applicable in EFL teaching that aims to wider students' comprehension of the conflict between neurodiversity and neurotypicality, to provide them with communicative and collaborative strategies which may help them to navigate in society. Further, the pedagogical analysis has examined to what extent *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* presents students with accurate and self-determining material in order to grant them with an empowering view of ASD not being a deprivation.

Firstly, this essay claims that the first person narrative provided by the main character, Christopher, in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* contribute to providing its reader with a chance to appropriate a neurodiverse person's point of view, which may give them an insight of what life may be like from that cognitive

perspective. Owing to this inclusiveness and authenticity of the neurodiverse perspective, it is claimed the reader becomes well acquainted with the disabling effects of misjudgement and different types of patronising societal norms, attitudes and practice may have on an individual due to their interactional and behavioural impairments.

Secondly, Haddon's novel opens up to for the reader to receive a broader understanding for how even unintentional or unconscious attitudes and behaviour could maintain the dominant discourse that is held over the concept of disability. This becomes notable when looking to Christopher's encounters with police officers, as these situations clearly illustrate how the public disregard for ASD may contribute to the risk that neurodiverse individuals are exposed to discriminating treatment. Thereof, it is also argued that the reason behind this neglect could be due to the fact that neurodiversity is an invisible impairment, as that further add to the greater risk of being faced with patronising behaviour, than if they would have had a visible impairment. Consequently, by reading Haddon's novel, readers may also come to develop a better understanding for the need to treat neurological disorders with greater general knowledge and attention to avoid misunderstandings between neurotypical and neurodiverse people.

Thirdly, through the protagonist's relationship with his father, Rhodri, and Siobhan, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* portrays how an informed immediate surrounding could have the power to both limit and encourage neurodiverse individuals' colloquial life. This becomes clear through Christopher's descriptions of how these secondary characters treat and communicate with him, as their actions, roles, and attitudes could be said to indicate the profound rooting of the hegemonic structures of the medical model of disability that concerns the notion of neurodiversity. Therefore, it is claimed that Haddon's novel could grant the readers with greater awareness for how disability in many ways is socially and culturally constructed. Moreover, it is argued that in this process Haddon additionally illustrates the importance of listening to the

voices of impairment in order to work towards the emancipation and self-determination of disabled individuals.

Subsequently, these aforementioned aspects indicate that *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* will guide the readers, and additionally students, into gaining a deeper understanding for the notion of cognitive diversity. Wherefore the students may become more inclusive towards functional impairments, which in turn may help them to create healthy relationships with other people around them. It is therefore argued that the novel prompts teaching on two levels; to provide neurotypical as well as neurodiverse students with the communicative and collaborative strategies that will guide them to better understand each other and their social surroundings.

However, the novel also includes a few aspects which may make it challenging to use in the EFL classroom. When looking to the aspects of accuracy and self-determination they could provide both insights and perils depending on what previous conceptions the students may have about neurodiversity as well as what type of perspective they are more prone to appropriate. Still, it is claimed that with the help of contextualizing teachers that invite their students to critically analyse the various perspectives of neurodiversity and neurotypicality, the novel may help to broaden the students' understanding and acceptance towards cognitive disabilities.

Nevertheless, it would be interesting to examine Haddon's novel from an empirical perspective by investigating if the findings of this essay would correspond to the usage of the novel in an actual EFL classroom setting. Pursuantly, this would provide the in-service teacher with a valuable practical perspective on teaching neurodiversity, as this essay mainly explore the theoretical point of view. Yet, all things considered, by presenting a plot and an authentic neurodiverse internal focalisation *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* does indeed raises awareness for the complexity of the interactional and behavioural impairments due to ASD in relation to

neurotypicality. Thereby, the novel would certainly be an adequate choice of literature when aiming to wider students' comprehension of the social friction between neurotypicality and neurodiversity, as well as to give them strategies which may help them to orient themselves in the world in which they function. It is thus suggested that such teaching may guide the students to grow into becoming empathic individuals who are accepting and understanding towards other people, without regard to their potential neurological state.

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