Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*: A Crossover Fiction Reading

A Paper

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Abstract

Blurring the lines between children and adult's fiction, crossover fiction, which employs several genres such as fantasy, horror, detective and science fiction, appeals to several types of readers regardless of age or ideology. This paper aims to analyze Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) as, thematically and technically, embodying the main features of crossover fiction. In other words, the paper focuses on showing how Haddon's novel probes the inner world of a fifteen-year- old boy, suffering from autism, who goes through the process of coming of age in a detective atmosphere full of crime that is characteristic of crossover fiction. The paper also shows that by employing the form of the detective novel, *The Incident* raises the interest of its dual readers (adults and children).To show that Haddon's novel, *The Incident*, makes use of postmodern techniques, e.g. charts, graphs, drawings and other typographical elements, to lay bare the limitation of language as a means of communication is also among the main aims of this paper.

Keywords: Mark Haddon. Crossover Fiction. Detective Novel. Dual Readers. Postmodern Techniques.

Blurring the lines between conventional children and adult's fiction, the recent renowned genre "crossover fiction" rose to prominence with the publication of Rowling's *Harry Potter* series in the late 1990s and the early 21st century. Transcending age boundaries, crossover fiction (adult-to-child or child-to-adult) also crosses genres as realism, fantasy, science fiction, mystery, etc. (Beckett 2010). However, it should not be considered a "new phenomenon" (Beckett, 2010. 2). In fact, crossover fiction has been characteristic of world classics since the far antiquity in famous works such as Aesop's *Fables* or *The Arabian Nights*; the seventeenth century *Don Quixote* (1605, 1615); the eighteenth century *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Gulliver's Travel* (1726) and the nineteenth century *Oliver Twist* (1947-39) and *David Copperfield* (1849-50), to cite just a few examples. Though intended for the general public – as there

was no specific category distinguished as children literature known before – such works managed to cross age boundaries and appeal to all types of readers.

According to Beckett, several works, which were "marketed as children's books, are in fact intended for readers of all ages. Many authors have claimed that their books which were published for young readers were not written with that audience in mind "(Beckett 2009. 3). Therefore, some critics began to classify writers of crossfiction to determine its nature. For example, Galef (1995) distinguishes three types of authors who write crossover literature. According to Galef, the first type is the author of adult's fiction who begins writing for children in his mid-career – probably after the birth of his first child (29) such as Roald Dahl. The second type is the author who writes for both adults and children in separate books such as Russell Hoban. The last type is the author who writes for both adults and children in the same book.

In fact, several definitions of crossover fiction adopt Galef's third type as a major characteristic of crossover fiction. For example, Armistead defines crossover as "books that appeal to both adults and children" (2001. 33). Similarly, Kellaway maintains that crossover works are "those written for children but read by adults too" (2003. 5), whereas Smith argues that they "appeal to readers young and all" (2005. 12). Though Knoeflamcher is historically claimed to be the first to use the term "crossover" to express crossing ages (Beckett, 1999), other critics find it more difficult to determine what constitutes crossover fiction probably because of the lack of clear demarcation between adult and child fiction. For example, Hunt (2001) argues that "one of the delights of children's literature is that it does not fit easily into any cultural or academic category" (1). In addition, the fact that the protagonist of a book is a child does not necessarily mean that it is a children's book. Likewise, Kellaway remarks that the fact that a book deals with adults' issues may not necessarily mean that it can be considered crossover fiction (2004). For instance, picture books which, according to Beckett (1999), have been classified as children's, "can address any or all age groups" (xvi). The same view can also be applied to graphic novels and comics. Beckett too argues that many children books such as *Alice in the Wonderland* and *The Wind in the Willows,* which are widely read by adults, were originally written for children (2009. 3).

Besides age boundaries, some critics argue that cultural norms may also affect appreciating crossover literature. For example, crossing age boundaries may differ from one country to another. Similarly, determining the appropriateness of a book to the intended reader may vary from one culture to another. However, other critics reject the idea of age boundaries. In this context, Donnelly (2004) argues that

> the idea that books for and about children can only be of interest to children is not just abused, it is offensive … Books are not gated communities; they're open cities where we can come and go at will, freely sampling other lives and times, other cultures and realities. The crossover reinforces this. (31)

Similarly, Beckett remarks that

> Perhaps the twenty-first century will bring an age in which 'child' and 'adult' are no longer defining categories and cross writing will no longer be seen as a transgressing or transcending of 'borders'. (1999. xix)

Furthermore, Beckett suggests that instead of focusing on age as a defining category, it is important to pay attention to the growing effect of print and electronic media (2009. 270).

The emphasis on age boundaries led to the emergence of some terms/labels such as "young adult" fiction or "kidult / kiddult" fiction which were later considered synonymous with "crossover fiction" Defining "young adult" novel, Nikolajeva says:

> The young adult novel (or teenage novel or adolescent novel) is the intermediary mode between children's and adult fiction, depicting the character's marginal situation between childhood and adulthood, when there is no way back, but the inevitability of the final step into grown up life has not yet been accepted. (1997. 17)

The term "kidult" itself has been used to refer to films and TV programs that appeal to all ages. Falconer even argues that it is in this sense that famous films such as Star Wars, Shrek and Monsters, The lord of the Rings as well as TV series such as Buffy, the Vampire and the Simpsons have crossover appeal. The term "Kidult" was first used by Peter Martin in his article in *The New York Times*, 1985. According to Falconer, it describes

> not just fiction but any form of entertainment that would be likely to appeal to a mixed age audience. A few years later, the noun 'kid(d)ult' had become the term for an adult who

> trespasses into children's culture and the sense of breaking a taboo was paramount. (2009. 32)

The interaction between children's culture and the adult's results in the emergency of crossover fiction. Therefore, in 2007, according to Falconer, "children's literature had 'come of age' and consequently could be 'legitimately' read by adults" (3). In addition, the practicing of cross-reading itself shows, to use Falconer's words, "how our attitudes to childhood, adulthood, and the in-between state of adolescence are all shifting, becoming more flexible and porous, as we adapt to changing social conditions in the developed world" (4). More prominently, crossover writers explore salient issues which appeal to different categories of readers such as "the war of religions, the relativity of good and evil, the fragility of the natural world, and so on. And in contrast to serious 'literary' novelists, they were doing so in straightforward, well-crafted but accessible prose" (Falconer 4-5).

However, despite acknowledging the nature of crossover fiction as a developed or mature form of children literature, as the phrase "coming of age" suggests, Falconer finds it difficult to define crossover fiction as a distinctive genre which displays certain common characteristics because "there are no stable set of traits, no themes or motifs or modes of address or narrative dynamics, which are common to all – or even, most of the fiction 'ostensibly written for children' which has recently been taken up by adult readers" (27). Consequently, she concludes that crossover fiction "represents too varied a group of novels to be identified as a distinct genre or class of fiction" (27). The fact that it appeals to both children and adults, in Falconer's view, makes it difficult to conceive crossover fiction as a "distinct literary genre" (27). Furthermore, instead of defining crossover fiction, Falconer attempts to define crossover fiction saying: "crossover fiction is fiction that calls into question the boundaries which used to define children's fiction by prescribing what it should contain or exclude"(27).
She adds that the main function of crossover fiction is to raise the

> reader's awareness of the areas of overlap as well as the differences between children's and adult fiction. It prompts the reader to interrogate everything that happens in-between territories, invites us to measure our difference from the recent past and the speed with which we are hurtling

> towards new concepts of self, of childhood, of aging and dying. (27)

Unlike Falconer who argues that there are no common themes or traits that distinguish crossover fiction, Beckett (2009) remarks that several genres such as folk and fairy tales literature and popular genres such as horror, detective, romance, fantasy and science fiction may be labeled as "crossover" fiction. Beckett also argues that some writers used to resort to political allegory in their children stories, such as Aesopian children literature, to avoid censorship or maintain adults' interests. In this way, crossover fiction writers create

> an ambivalent implied reader who certainly cannot be separated into a child 'pseudo addressee' and an adult 'genuine addressee'. Both adults and children are able to share more or less equally, albeit in different ways, in the reading experience. Crossover fiction blurs the borderline between two traditionally separate readerships: children and adults.
> (Beckett 2009. 3)

Furthermore, crossover fiction has certain characteristics. For example, its hybridized nature is evident in its ability to cross age boundaries as well as various genres such as romance, science fiction, mystery, etc. Also, unlike classical children literature, contemporary crossover fiction is distinguished by its "complex plot with multiple, interwoven storyline" (Beckett 2009. 260), which makes it more appealing to adults. Instead of common characters stereotypes, contemporary crossover fiction reveals more complex ones. Non-human characters or animals may be also used to maintain children's interest.

Moreover, crossover fiction is remarkable for its storytelling and narrative perspective which presents the child's view to the reader through the process of coming of age. Therefore, it reveals "a sense of lightness and, conversely of mortal limit; a sense that the process of coming of age means something new and different in our time; and a sense that the child's age view can reinvigorate, transform and even redeem adult lives" (Falconer 2009. 8). In addition, writers of crossover fiction adopt complex technical devices and forms. Their works often display "genre blending, metafiction, and polyfocalization, with more audacity than their counterparts writing exclusively for adults" (Beckett 2009.260).They also employ "forwards, prefaces, introductions, afterwards, notes and other forms of parataxis (Beckett 2009. 232) as

well as illustrations, dedications and explanatory notes which, in Beckett's words, "play an essential role in determining a book's audience" (234). Preoccupied with one major theme, i.e. "coming of age," which is interesting for both children and adults, crossover works are usually long and written in a series such as trilogy, tetralogy, etc. and present a child's own perspective as well as the adult's. Both Falconer and Beckett share also the view that crossover fiction is published simultaneously for both children and adults.

Mark Haddon's novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003), could be considered a perfect example of crossover fiction. It embodies most of the characteristics of crossover fiction such as blending genres, complex character, remarkable storytelling, and innovative narrative which employs several forms of paratexts and blends metafiction with realism and detective fiction. Furthermore, to use Falconer's words, "it was this novel that brought home the point that realistic fiction for children could cross over to adult readers as easily as fantasy" (2009. 95). Indeed, *The Curious Incident* ushered a new phase in the development of crossover fiction which used to associate children's literature with fantasy. It attempts to prove that children literature can also successfully employ realism. Therefore, as Falconer puts it,

> One could say that Rowling attracted greater numbers of adult readers to children's fantasy fiction than ever before, that Pullman legitimized that adult interest by elevating children's fantasy to the status of the seriously 'literary', and that Haddon's *The Curious Incident* greatly increased the numbers of adults reading children's realist fiction. (96)

Originally written for adults, *The Curious Incident* also passed for children. It was published simultaneously in two editions, one for adults and the other for children. It won the South Bank Show Award (2004) and the Whitbread Book of the Year (2004), in addition to other seventeen awards, according to Haddon's official web-site. *The Curious Incident* also marked a new phase in the development of Haddon himself. Beckett comments that "after the success of his novel, Haddon talked about his 'coming out as a writer,' as if his entry into the world of adult fiction marked his coming of age as an author.

Like crossover novels, *The Curious Incident (C I)*,is a coming of age story of a motherless 15 year old boy called Christopher Boone suffering from Asperger Syndrome – a form of autism. The novel begins in the late midnight when Christopher is walking alone around his house and discovers the murder of his neighbour's dog, Wellington, with a fork. Guided by his teacher, Siobhan, Christopher decides to write a detective story to find out who killed Wellington. However, in his search for the murderer, Christopher uncovers the truth about his assumed dead mother. Christopher's father has lied about the death of his wife because she eloped with their neighbor, Mr. Shears, the husband of the dog's owner. Moreover, his father confesses that he killed Wellington. Shocked by his father's confessions and lies, Christopher is so frightened that he decides to leave the house and goes to live with his mother in London.

Such a decision marks a new phase in his life. His journey from Swindon, his home town, to London, where his mother lives, is a new experience which could have never been fulfilled due to his disability. Despite the fact that he has never travelled alone, Christopher manages to overcome his fears and anxiety and finally to reunite with his mother. They also come back to Swindon so that Christopher could have his A level in Maths. Christopher is proud of himself and decides to pursue his studies at the university. He also succeeds in reuniting with his father – though not as strongly as before. His father even brings him a dog as a present. The end of the novel, thus, shows Christopher as a successful student and a grown up, independent young man who learns a lot through his life experience.

The novel is remarkable for its narrator, the 15 year old boy with Asperger Syndrome. Though never mentioned directly in the novel, it is clear that the young protagonist suffers from a form of autism. Despite the fact that Christopher's disability might enhance a sense of detachment on the part of the reader and thus affects his identification with the protagonist, Haddon presents his novel from the perspective of this child who is "Othered" by the society for his disability. Indeed, it is through disability that Haddon establishes the unique nature of his protagonist.

Describing the characteristics of Asperger syndrome, Kerby says that they include:

> Marked deficiencies in social skills … [a preference for] sameness … obsessive routine … may be preoccupied with

> a particular subject or interest … may have a great deal of difficulty reading non-verbal cues … and determining body space. Often overly sensitive to sounds, tastes, smells and sights, the person with AS may prefer soft clothing, certain foods … exhibit exceptional skills or talent in a specific area … often have deficits in pragmatics and prosody. (n. pag.)

Haddon's protagonist displays all the features of Asperger syndrome. He is obsessed with numbers and computers. The chapters of his story are even given prime numbers because he likes them: "They are what is left when you have taken all the patterns away," hence, they are "like life" (Haddon, *C I* 14). His mind works like a computer. He keeps all information in his mind and can restore any data any time. He can remember all past memories. His memory is like "A DVD because I don't have to Rewind through everything in between to get to the memory of something a long time ago (*C I* 96). Unlike Christopher, his grandmother's dementia is like "pictures in her head … all confused, like someone has muddled the film up" (*C I* 99). He is at a special school. He prefers routine work and order, "and one way of being in a nice order was to be logical. Especially if those things were numbers or an argument" (*C I* 31). He likes Mathematics because he likes rules and logic, though "in life you have to take lots of decisions" (*C I* 106) which would be wrong because they depend on intuition not logic. In addition, as Christopher himself points out,

> Mr. Jeavons said that I liked Maths because it was safe. He said I liked Maths because it meant solving problems, and these problems were difficult and interesting, but there was always a straightforward solution at the end. And what he meant was that Maths wasn't like life because in life there are no straightforward answers at the end. I know he meant this because this is what he said. (*C I* 78)

Christopher's success at solving several complex problems, such as the "Monty Hall" one, proves that logic can be more reliable than intuition.

On the other hand, Christopher's inability to comprehend facial expression or communicate effectively with others reflects also his preference for literalness. To solve the first problem, his teacher, Siobhan, has drawn certain images of people's facial expressions to help Christopher understand them. Yet, he fails to figure out what people actually mean. His lack of social skills is also marked with limited

vocabularies and lack of imagination. For example, the old neighbor who needs care is described as smelling "of body odour and old biscuits and off popcorn which is what you smell of if you haven't washed for a very long time, like Jason at school smells because his family is poor" (*C I* 49). He is scared when Mrs. Shears, his neighbor, accuses him of killing her dog: "I put my hands over my ears and closed my eyes and rolled forward till I was hunched up with my forehead pressed on the grass" (*C I* 4). He is unable to understand what the policeman means by giving him a "caution" because he hit a policeman: "Is that going to be on a piece of paper like a certificate I can keep" (*C I* 23). During his journey to London, when a woman tries to talk to him at the Paddington station, he warns her "I've got a Swiss Army Knife and it has a saw blade and it could cut someone's fingers off" (*C I* 229). He dislikes being touched. His parent cannot even hug him. Instead, to express their love for Christopher, they expand their hands like a fan and touch each other's thumbs.

By establishing the unique nature of his protagonist, Haddon has created a great sense of defamiliarization on the part of the readers, the majority of whom cannot identify with Christopher for his disability. In addition, Christopher's character is unlikely to make him the hero of a story in conventional fiction. Haddon presents his novel as a coming-of-age story of a 15 year old boy with autism who views the world from his own perspective. However, Haddon employs several metafictional devices to involve the wide range of his readership, both young and adult, hence the success of his novel as a crossover work of fiction.

From the early beginning of the novel, Christopher declares that he is writing a story about the murder of his neighbour's dog. So, the reader is aware of the metafictional frame of the novel as a story within a story. In addition, Christopher's decision to write his own story using the detective fiction form does not only reflect his inability to go beyond factual knowledge but also his choice of Conan Doyle as an example to emulate is another metanarrative device which enables the narrator/Haddon to comment on another intertext, i.e., *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, besides giving his summary of it, and the whole genre of detective fiction in general.

Writing a detective story is a means to prove Christopher's intellectual mastery. He expresses his dissatisfaction with children "from the school down the road [who] see us in the street … and then shout 'Special Needs? Special Needs"! (*C I* 56). Thus, in order to prove that he

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is not 'stupid' Christopher decides to write his story. In addition, he identifies himself with his favorite hero, Sherlock Holmes, whom he admires for both share common characteristics. For example, Holmes is

> very intelligent and he solves the mystery. The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes.
>
> But he notices them, like I do. Also it says in the book Sherlock Holmes had, in a very remarkable degree, the power of detaching his mind at will. And this is like me too. (*C I* 92)

When he has a problem, Christopher resorts to Holmes: “And then I thought that I had to be like Sherlock Holmes and I had to detach my mind at will to a remarkable degree so that I did not notice how much it was hurting in my head" (*C I* 164).

Describing how Holmes often works, Christopher says "[Holmes'] mind … was busy endeavoring to frame some scheme into which all these strange and apparently disconnected episodes could be fitted" (*C I* 92) which Christopher intends to do: "And that is what I am trying to do by writing this book" (*C I* 92). Commenting on Christopher's several attempts at identifying himself with Holmes, Gilbert says:

> These moments are important. They demonstrate how embedded the figure of Holmes is in Christopher's consciousness. He needs this fictional character in order to make sense of his life and tell his story. But even this deeply embedded identification has its limits. The world is not just a series of puzzles to be solved by his prodigious powers of logic. In writing his own detective story, Christopher encounters the muddled irresolution of life rather than the satisfying structures of art. (246)

As a narrator of his own story, Christopher learns about himself as well as the difficult world he lives in. Thus, by establishing the unique nature of his narrator, Haddon forces his readers – both young and adult – to perceive the novel through Christopher's own perspective, limited as it is. In addition, Christopher's inability to communicate with people due to his disability intensifies the difficulty of coming to terms with his world or his reader. For example, Christopher realizes that when an old woman tells him that she has a grandson of his age, she is "doing what is called chatting, where people say things to each other which aren't

questions and answers and aren't connected" (*C I* 40). Similarly, his teacher tells him that "[I]f you raise one eyebrow it can mean lots of different things. It can mean 'I want to do sex with you' and it can mean 'I think that what you just said was very stupid' "(*C I* 14-15). Consequently, the reader's perception of the novel is greatly affected by Christopher's and thus will be one-dimensional.

Furthermore, by choosing to solve and write about the dog's murder, Christopher, to use Gilbert's words, "constructs his narrative with himself in the role of both detective and storyteller, interpreting or 'reading' the traces of another's crime or story" (243). In addition, deciphering the codes of the dog's murder, Christopher succeeds in uncovering the greatest mystery in his life, i.e., the assumed death of his mother. Ironically, in both crimes the doer is the same person, i.e., his father.

Remarkably, Christopher's role as a writer of detective fiction and the narrator of his own story is notably determined by his limited disability. To resolve the ambiguity of the world around him, Christopher chooses to dispense with traditional fiction. "I don't like proper novels, because they are lies about things which didn't happen and they make me feel shaky and scared" (*CI* 25). Instead, he chooses the detective genre for "in a murder mystery novel someone has to work out who the murderer is and then catch them. It is a puzzle. If it is a good puzzle you can sometimes work out the answer before the end of the book" (*C I* 5).

Besides Christopher's own learning difficulties such as his inability to use figurative language, his obsession with facts and minute details, his idiosyncratic conception of the ambiguities of the world around him his intention to prove his intellectual superiority over other kids, all motivate him to adopt the detective form for his story. His preoccupation with restoring and preserving order in detective fiction also reflects Christopher's own inclination to impose order in his own life, a fact that is manifest in his division of days into good and black days according to the number of red or yellow cars he sees in a row and his obsession with logic and Maths, to cite just a few examples.

On the other hand, Christopher's disability makes him a unique character among famous fictional detectives. For instance, Murray argues that

> traditionally, the place of disabled or impaired characters in crime narratives is either that of the silent or constrained witness, unable to communicate vital evidence, or the 'differently abled' detective, granted a particular type of insight because of a disability. (179)

In addition, Murray says

> the representation of protagonists in this latter category usually stresses some form of individual 'heroic' post-traumatic struggle in which the character wrestles with the event or circumstance that led to the disablement and the estrangement that ensues. (180)

However, unlike traditional crime characters, Haddon's protagonist is not a silent viewer of events. Rather, despite his disability, Christopher is determined to solve the mystery of the murder. He also acts heroically when he decides to go to his mother alone and succeeds in affecting the reader's mind and heart by emerging victoriously at the end of the novel as a young man who is determined to pursue his studies at the university and getting married.

Indeed, *The Curious Incident* could be better approached as a parody of the traditional detective fiction particularly as the main protagonist is denied the insight and intellectual capability often granted to famous detectives such as his favorite Sherlock Holmes. The fact that Christopher is a 15 year old boy with autism, his inability to go beyond facts, in addition to his failure to communicate with people properly, render him an anti-hero. On the other hand, the employment of detective fiction is essential for the development of Christopher's character. It provides him – to use Gilbert's words – with "a means to make sense of [his] experience" (242). Assuming himself to be the hero of his own detective story, Christopher, according to Gilbert, "draw [s] from the power of stories to negotiate a path through [his] painful and uncertain adolescent experience" (242). Seen in this light, Christopher's story – in Gilbert's view – "show[s] that detective fiction can be about more than murdered dogs, dead parents and spiraling deception" (242). The development of Christopher's character throughout the course of events renders his story a perfect example of coming of age one.

Despite his vulnerability, Christopher manages to carve a unique identity for himself. He manages to reunite with his mother, resolve the

murder of the dog, succeeds to pass the Maths exam and is determined to pursue his career: "I am going to go to university in another town … And I will get a first class honours degree and I will become a scientist. I was brave and I wrote a book and that means I can do anything" (*C I* 267-68). Instead of detaching the reader due to Christopher's disability, Haddon has thus succeeded in involving the reader both emotionally and intellectually. Unlike several critics who confirm Christopher's limitations or disability, Carter argues that Christopher is an enabled storyteller whose comic presentations reflect his preference rather than his limitations or disability. For example, though Christopher says he dislikes proper novels, he chooses to write a detective one (2007. 9). Furthermore, Christopher has been concerned with constructing his identity. Earlier in the novel, he expresses his dissatisfaction with his name. He dislikes being associated with the biblical allusion of his name. Told by his mother that Christopher alludes to the person who carried Christ across the river, Christopher emphasizes, "I want my name to mean me" (*C I* 20). So, he has been concerned with selfhood and identity construction, a fact that is confirmed by Haddon's choice of Christopher as the narrator of his story.

As a postmodern novel, *The Curious Incident*'s employment of the detective genre, as Ciocia points out,

> presents the reader with both a grippling and humourous plot and some clever meta narrative reflections, in a brilliant example of the 'dual address […] that is the marks not only of many great postmodern texts but also of classic children's literature. (321)

The success of *The Curious Incident* as a crossover novel, from Ciocia's point of view, is largely due to Haddon's use of the detective fiction novel. She argues that “regardless of Christopher's continuous, unpredictable digressions, we are following a dynamic, plot-driven narrative underpinned by a teleogical drive towards the disclosure of one (or, as it turns out, more than one) mystery” (323). The reader's interest in the plot is also heightened by Haddon's employment of other devices as "the big font, and large spacing between the lines, the short chapters, even the paratactic syntax," all "make this novel a fast read, in spite of the fact that the left itself is typographically not easy on the eye as it could have been, given its use of sans serif characters" (Ciocia 323).

By revisiting a popular genre as the detective fiction, Haddon emphasizes the nature of his novel as postmodern. The choice of the

narrator, a fifteen-year-old boy with autism, furthermore, deconstructs not only the detective genre but also defies the whole issue of childhood representation in fiction in general. Unlike the common heroes of detective fiction, Christopher fits more as an anti-hero. Despite his great mental capabilities, Christopher fails to resolve the mystery of the dog's murder. It was his father's confession not Christopher's own investigations that uncovered that murder. Ciocia argues that

> In the classic (typically British) murder story, …, detection is characterized as an elitist intellectual game, morally and socially conservative: the hero (Holmes, Poirot, etc.) relies on a rational and contemplative approach to the case, and remains ultimately detached from it. The aim is to restore, not to challenge, the status quo, whose ideological a priori goes unquestioned, while the brilliancy of the investigator's deductive powers perpetuates the myths that we live in a knowable and controllable world. (325)

Unlike classic detective fiction, the narrator fails to detach himself from his mystery novel. Rather, it leads him to uncover the mystery of his own life. In addition, the discovery that Wellington's murderer is his father does not resolve the murder or restore the status quo. On the contrary, it functions as an anti-climax which shocks the reader who is again involved in a bigger mystery that draws attention to the injustices done to Christopher by his father who deprives him of his mother and by society that regards Christopher as a social outcast due to his autism. Besides, the ending of the novel deconstructs that of conventional detective fiction. Ray remarks that the novel

> does not end with Christopher coming to some terms with mainstream society, nor does it end with his parents reuniting. The 'climax' – finding out who killed the dog, as per the novel's title – is anticlimactic, underscoring the importance of not resolving Christopher's abnormality in the novel. (n. pag.)

The Curious incident also comments on the representation of disability in particular and childhood fiction in general. Rather than focusing on Christopher as an "Other," the novel deconstructs the concept of social normalcy. In the midst of deception, lies, mysteries, dysfunctional families and underestimation, Christopher forces the reader to view his life from his own perspective as a normal person,

hence the necessity of reconsidering the norms of society itself. A close study of Christopher's character– to use Ray's words – proves that "disability is a social construction" (n. pag.) rather than a medical or physical concept. The novel provides several examples of Christopher's inability to make a comprehensive communication with people due to his disability which cast him as an "Other'. The dialogue between Christopher and the Station Officer when Christopher wants to buy a ticket to go to London is ironical:

> And the man said, "single or return?'
> And I said, 'what does single or return mean?'
> And he said, 'Do you want to go one way, or do you want to go and come back?'
> And I said, 'I want to stay there when I get there'
> And he said, For how long?'
> And I said, 'Until I go to university?'
> And he said, 'single, then? (*C I* 189)

The dialogue reflects Christopher’s difficulty of communication with the outer world. However, the reader tends to adopt Christopher's point of view and ironically blames the Officer who cannot understand or comprehend Christopher's needs. Moreover, it also reflects Christopher's limited language. The repetition of certain words such as "And I said," "And he said" or in other examples in the novel in which his sentences usually begin with "And I", "So I," "Then I", etc. all show Christopher's limited vocabulary. Christopher also criticizes the inconsistency of Christian society that fails to practise what it preaches. He says, for example,

> The Bible … says Thou Shall not Kill, but there were the Crusades and Two World Wars and the Gulf War and there were Christians killing people in all of them. (*C I* 38).

In addition, Christopher's inability to forgive his father for lying to him about his dead mother and the fact that the novel itself does not end with the family reconciliation are not due to Christopher's disability. Rather, it is the disability of the whole society that fails to provide Christopher with a safe and secure milieu and a well-balanced family that is criticized. Moreover, the reader tends not only to sympathize with Christopher in his dilemma but also appreciate his determination to pursue his career as a successful student and a young man who longs to have "a degree and a job, earn lots of money, and get a lady to marry me […] so she can look after me so I can have company" (*C I* 45) which seem to be the aspirations of the majority of young men of his age. It is also striking that, unlike old people of his society like his father, mother

and neighbor who are in perpetual search for their self-knowledge and peace of mind, Christopher is quite aware of his capabilities and limitations, which do not seem to hinder his development. Indeed, his "disability" brings him the peace of mind his elders lack. He does not condemn society for his own failures. On the contrary, he tries to solve his own problems himself and cope with the outer world as possible. The ending of the novel – as a successful coming-of-age story proves the validity of Christopher's perspective. It is the society that has to reconsider its norms and learn how to integrate and appreciate young disabled men like Christopher.

Unlike several works of fiction and popular culture that depict disabled children as silent or marginalized figures, Haddon's novel presents a positive image of a disabled child who manages to carve out his own identity and proves that it is the society that is disabled not Christopher. Rather than presenting his protagonist as a simple character. Haddon is careful to investigate his various motivations, which render him a complex character that challenges the social norms of normalcy. Therefore, to quote Rudd,

> Our sense of normality is thereby questioned, and the hypocrisies of our society uncovered as we consider the messy lives of the adults in the book, and start to realize how adolescents can become the scapegoats of society where adults are often the ones "out of control,' not only attacking fellow Christians, but innocent dogs, too. (n.pag.)

The Curious Incident does not only deconstruct the detective genre or literature on disability but also the representation of childhood in contemporary fiction in general. According to Ciocia, Haddon's novel disrupts the old concept of childhood as an age of innocence. In addition, it

> provides an incisive, if implicit, commentary on this revisionist trend, given how Christopher can reclaim this idea of pure innocence, not because of his age, but because of his disorder. In this text, Asperger's syndrome effectively provides a foil for the ambivalence often experienced by adults towards adolescent figures in contemporary culture …. In short, Christopher embodies our current worries and mixed feelings about adolescence; like Asperger's syndrome, young adulthood these days is 'a condition' that

> warrants a dual response: a desire to protect and prolong the state of 'innocence' that comes with it, but also an anxiety toward what we know to be different from us, and what we fear to be potentially violent and uncontrollable. (330-331)

The Curious Incident is not only a parody of detective fiction but also a parody of formal realism. Christopher's inability to go beyond factual knowledge and his obsession with minute details satirize conventional realism. His rejection of figurative language and other forms of fiction in general renders *The Curious Incident* a comment on an important issue in postmodern literature, that is, the relationship between fact and fiction and the representation of reality in general.

By forcing Christopher's own perspective on the reader, since he is the narrator of his own story as well as that of the dog's murder, Haddon has provided his reader with fresh insight into reality which forces him/ her to reconsider his/her perception of human experience in addition to reflecting on the attitude of society towards young children like Christopher. Indeed, the structure of the novel displays various layers of narrative. Besides, it also draws attention to itself as a metafictional narrative about reading and writing fiction. In this context, Falconer states:

> not only does the implied narrator help Christopher narrate two kinds of story, a diary and a murder mystery, this secondary narrator also has a further two stories to tell: the narrative of Christopher's coming of age, plus another metafictional narrative about the pleasures of creating and reading fiction. In this fourth narrative, Christopher becomes a figure for the author who enjoys creating narrative out of chaotic experience ….Christopher also functions as a figure for the reader, who in reading makes order from the chaos of words and images in his or her head. But Christopher also becomes a champion for the most specially realist writer (or reader), for whom fantasy is an unnecessary diversion from the wonders of the actual world. (163-164)

Christopher's dislike of metaphor, his inability to decipher facial expression and his difficulty of communicating with outside world reflect the inability of language to communicate meaning. Haddon has to dispense with formal realism – even satirizes it sometimes. For example, Christopher's talent for observation is evident in his description

of Mr. Jeavon's shoes which have "approximately 60 tiny circular holes in each of his brown shoes (*C I* 5). Similarly, his description of the cell in which he is imprisoned for attacking a police officer is also a satire on conventional realism:

> It was almost a perfect cube, 2 meters by 2 meters wide by 2 meters high. It contained approximately 8 cubic meters of air. It had a small window with bars, on the opposite side, a metal door with a long, thin hatch near the floor for sliding trays of food into the cell …. (*C I* 17)

In addition to revealing Christopher's obsession with minute details, this description is a parody of conventional realism and its limited representation of reality.

Because he is obsessed with literalness and logic, Christopher dislikes metaphor. He gives examples of metaphors he cannot comprehend: "they had a skeleton in the cupboard," "we had a real pig of a day", and "the dog was store dead" (*C I* 20-21). Christopher/Haddon criticizes the inability of language to communicate meaning. Thus, he perceives metaphor as a lie,

> because a pig is not like a day and people have skeleton in their cupboard. And when I try and make a picture of the phrase in my head it just confuses me because imagining an apple in someone's eye doesn't have anything to do with liking someone a lot and it makes you forget what the person was talking about. (*C I* 20)

On the other hand, he prefers a simile, which, unlike metaphor, presents reality. He describes a police officer with hairy nose who "looked as if there were two very small mice hiding in his nostrils" (*C I* 22).

It is by involving the reader in Christopher's world and adopting his vision that Haddon's novel gains crossover appeal. Creating a sense of humour , as provided in the previous example, is one of the means through which Haddon attempts to engage his readers in his novel. Besides providing a great sense of humor, Christopher's dislike of metaphor is ironical. For example, in solving the mystery of Wellington's murder, Christopher had a "skeleton in the cupboard" when he finds out the hidden letters of his mother in his father's cupboard. He also has a "real pig of a day "when he realizes that his father has lied to him about his mother and that he has killed the dog. Christopher also finds the dog stoned dead in the garden of their neighbor.

Haddon's use of humor has thus succeeded in involving the reader who might find it less interesting to read a novel about a child with Asperger's syndrome. Some critics even consider *The Curious Incident* a comedy. For example, Greenwell argues that the novel

> is not simply a gagathon, however, anymore than it is metafiction incarnate. It's also a suburban comedy, set in Swindon, a town considered even by some of its inhabitants (who call it 'Swindown') as featureless place only for its railway junctions and experimental rounds-abouts …. The novel is a comedy about marriage cracking up, about mundane daily lives, about growing old, about meal times, TV programmes, about trains with messy toilets. And at the heart of it, there is a character who experiences alienation and pain, but who does not feel that pain as we think we might. (282)

The reader's sympathy with Christopher for his alienation and pain is also another means of involving him/her in the novel. Cunningly, Haddon forces his readers to answer this question: who is dysfunctional: Christopher or the society?

Christopher's recurrent digressions provide another source of humor. For example, chapter 173 is completely devoted to showing that it is silly to join the dots between constellation as in Orion, the hunter and that it would be more like a dinosaur. He also gives illustration to prove his point of view. The reader also shares Christopher's satire at the complication of the signs in the underground. Christopher's concept of the Monty Hall problem is also interesting and humorous. Commenting on Christopher's handling of the problem, Greenwell says:

> This is a particular stroke of genius on Haddon's part, because he puts innumerable readers […] into mental difficulty. Christopher thinks the statistics are simple; we don't. We are therefore forced to reverse our roles. When at the end of the novel, Christopher gains a grade A in his A level Maths examination, we are given his favorite question in an appendix. It looks like an alien object, and it makes me feel queasy. (281)

Engaging the reader in his novel has been one of Haddon's goals to maintain the crossover appeal. He explains that “the book has a simple language, a carefully shaped plot and invites you to enter somebody else's life. And these, I think, are the aspects of the book that appeal to

most younger readers." (n. pag.) In the same way, he explains why the novel appeals to adults:

> It isn't entirely comfortable. It's about how little separates us from those we turn away from in the street. It's about how badly we communicate with one another. It's about accepting that every life is narrow and that our only escape from this is not to run away (to another country, another relationship, a slimmer, more confident self) but to learn to love the people we are and the world in which we find ourselves. (n. pag.)

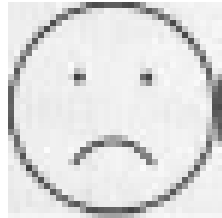
By addressing a serious issue, that is, the child-adult relationship and their different, often clashing perspectives-crossover fiction – Haddon's novel, as an example – in Mills' words, "points to a major crisis in child-adult relationships which would explain its increasing appeal to both types of reader" (158).

Haddon's employment of typography and other visual and media effects such as photos, drawing, graphs, logos, etc. is also a successful means of involving a wide range of readership, in addition to focusing on blurring the lines between fact and fiction. By challenging conventional mimetic fiction, Haddon presents another version of reality and criticizes the inability of language to convey meaning or the whole truth. For instance, to express Christopher's fear when encountered with the unknown in his journey from Swindon to London Haddon uses typography. Blocks of signifiers are used with different typing kinds such as "Sweet pastries **Heathrow Airport Check** – *In Here Bagel Factory* EAT **excellence and taste**." When Christopher's fear is surmounting, the same signifiers are reduced to incomprehensible letters and graphic signs: Swea*thr* □□ow **OAir phech** – *lagtory* **EAvenceand taste**" (*C I* 209). Besides involving the reader in the crisis of a lonely child with disability, the use of this technique has its metafictional significance. Falconer argues that

> Metafictionally, the observant Christopher provides the reader with two possible responses to postmodern, transitory space. On the one hand, one can feel a paranoiac sense, as Christopher clearly does, that strangeness, transience and linguistic excess represent a threat to the individual's identity. On the other hand, however, one can read this scene as an instance of joyous postmodernism, in

> which the subject is exhilarated and transformed by the encounter with plurality and otherness. (110)

Haddon also uses pictures as alternative means of rendering feelings and producing reality. At the beginning of his story, Christopher says, for example,

> when I first met Siobhan, showed me this picture
>
> 
>
> And I know that it meant 'sad," which is what I felt when I found the dead dog." (*C I* 2)

Ainslie comments that "the picture's meaning… is located in the kind of language that is not produced by narration" (101). Accordingly, Ainslie suggests that there are two kinds of language: "that which is *produced* by the narration and that which is *produced* by another and *used* by the narration" (101).

Due to his limited abilities, Christopher relies on images, drawings and diagrams to reconstruct meaning and produce his version of reality. Though Sibohan, his teacher, argues that "the idea of a book was to describe things using words so that people could read them and make a picture in their own head" (*C I* 85), Christopher thinks that images or illustrations can best express his point of view.

Carter remarks that

> in any instance where a graphic is produced by 'like this it may be that we are not looking at a more illustration but an 'image texted' simile … Many …[pictographic] examples are … preceded by 'like this' but are clearly images that Christopher doesn't have words to adequately represent. And why should he? We can read the shapes and forms just five, better, more accurately, even, then if we could read only words … Christopher has, in these instances, solved ‘the problem of
> ekphrasis’ in his narrative, a pointed example of how he is enabled. (17-19)

Christopher uses illustrations, texts and imagery, which enable him to visualize the things he sees such as seats of the tube train, the alien robot,

the cloud, etc. He also uses them to express his fear and loneliness particularly when he is at the Paddington Station. Haddon's use of images and graphics to represent Christopher's thought and feelings is twofold. On the one hand, they promote the reader's engagement in the novel. They are also successfully integrated within the novel as the only means a child of disability, particularly his limited use of vocabulary, can resort to to render his thoughts to the reader and therefore, forcing his own perspective of the world /reality on the reader. On the other hand, they will also appeal to 21st century young and adult readers who spend much time on computer screens, which employ images and graphs that they become less interested in reading novels.

In addition, Haddon's technique forces more critical readers to reconsider conventional methods of narration, which rely on the written word as the sole means of communication. In addition, Haddon's use of the big fonts and other forms of typography enable him to present a new form of reading and writing fiction which does not only challenge conventional writing or reading but also a novel that enjoys crossover appeal.

The fact that the novel focuses on delineating the experience of a 15 year old boy suffering from autism and his coming of age story adds to the novel's realism. Unlike previous crossover fiction which resorts to fantasy, Haddon's novel is deeply rooted in its realistic depiction of the experience of a child with limited capabilities. According to Falconer, the success of Pullman's *His Dark Materials* Trilogy (1445-2000) and Rowling's *Harry Potter* Series (1997-2007) confirm some critics' views that crossover literature "would be limited to the genre of children's fantasy fiction" (2009. 95) However, Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* proves that children's fiction can maintain its crossover appeal by drawing also on realism. Haddon also manages to involve a wide variety of readers, both young and adults, in his novel by employing detective fiction, the coming-of-age experience of the adventures of a young man. Similarly, the more sophisticated readers will be interested to probe, with Christopher/Haddon (through the use of several metafictional devices), conventional means of representation which rely on a written form and investigate other means of storytelling, means of expression and communication other than language.

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