



Seeing Life Through New Eyes: Disability and Perception in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident*

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Abstract

Mark Haddon's The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (2003) portrays disability through the eyes of a neurodivergent child Christopher Boone. The novel exemplifies the disability discourse that illustrates perception, logic and senses, as alternative ways of engaging with the world. The paper goes beyond the medical model of disability and adopts the social model in exploring the ways communication apprehension, societal attitudes and stereotyped expectations of the world marginalise neurodivergent people. The paper analyses, through the keen lens of narrative voice and structure, Christopher's world to challenge the dominant paradigms of the world, intelligence and reason. The novel articulates disability to the absence of perception and invites the readers from the stems of empathy and inclusion disability discourse to view disability from the lens of a difference to perception, thus contributing to the discourse of contemporary literature and disability studies in a significant way.

Keywords: disability studies, neurodiversity, perception, social model of disability, narrative voice

Introduction

With the advent of the disability studies in contemporary literature, the concept of disability has primarily focused on the shifting of the discourse of representation of the disabled from a rather negative perspective of representation of physical or mental impairment as a tragedy and suffering to more positive and constructive approaches to studying identity, perception, and social exclusion. Contemporary novels steeped in Disability studies contest the medical model that defines disability as an individual deficiency and advocate for the social

model that identifies disability as stemming from social attitudes and structural impediments. Literature becomes a means to critique prevailing ideas of normalcy and ability.

Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) exemplifies this shift by telling the story from the perspective of Christopher Boone, a neurodivergent child. His logical reasoning and sensory hyper-sensitivity shape his worldview. The novel prioritizes Christopher's perspective, allowing the reader to experience clarity in his unique and cognitive world (Haddon). Christopher's



narrative voice leads Haddon to dismantle the ableist critique and demonstrate that it was the lack of social understanding and the absence of accommodation, not the destructive actions that created barriers in the protagonist's world.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time illustrates the duality of disability through cognitive and narrative structure. It embraces Disability Studies and argues that the novel constructs disability as a divergence in the modes of vision and interpretation of the world, fostering empathy, inclusivity, and expanding the boundaries of the normative human experience.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the theme of disability in the novel.
2. To examine how Christopher Boone understands the world around him.
3. To incorporate the social model of disability with the text.
4. To explore how the disability narrative voice impact.
5. To analyze the ways of challenging the orthodoxy of normalcy.

Research Methodology

1. Descriptive and textual analysis.
2. Haddon's novel serves as the primary text.
3. The use of Disability Studies as a framework.
4. Use journals and books as secondary sources.
5. Use MLA documentation style.

Research Gap

1. The focus of the studies is primarily on representation of autism.
2. The perception as a theme has not been emphasized as well.
3. A handful of studies deeply explore the social disability model.
4. The narrative voice and disability is a separated discussion.
5. This is the study that intersects perception, narrative, and disability.

Literature Review

1. The lens of Disability Studies views the systemic social world.
2. Critiques of the orthodoxy of normalcy descend from Lennard J. Davis.
3. The literature of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson is of great representation.
4. There has been critique of the novel's distinct narrative style.
5. The novel has been a popular choice in the study of Disability Theory.

Disability and Perception in *The Curious Incident*

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time is a novel by Mark Haddon that engages with the prevailing social construction in normalcy, intelligence, and perception. The title desired to engage a moment of interpretation rather than looking at normative mechanisms of closure. This is particularly pertinent to Disability Studies as it pushes against dominant ways of knowing that center a neurotypical way of thinking. For Lennard Davis, "normalcy" is a social construct that rationalizes the existence of others (and in this context the gaze of curiosity) (Davis 23). This is in part the title's critique, thinking of curiosity as a cognitive act rather than affective one.

The incident's narrative weight is framed through the ways in which it is situated perceptually. Christopher Boone's reasoning is what Garland-Thomson calls the locus to "recognize disabled ways of knowing as valid forms of meaning-making" (Garland-Thomson 6). Christopher is factual, pattern-oriented, and logically sequenced, and deliberately chooses to disregard metaphor and emotionally derived speculation. His assertion that he favors and "trust" facts over "false" constructs shows a cognitive preference for clarity over ambiguity and countering affective reasoning (Haddon).

The title also speaks to the disablement of social realms. The uneasiness evoked by "night-time" suggests an epistemic space that lacks clarity, is overloaded, and suffers from ambiguity and instability in interpretation. The submission of your



manuscript to the Paragon Journal has been delayed due to difficulties configuring Emerald's editing systems. The Emerald systems management team addressed the issue, allowing edits to be made to your manuscript, and we hope to avoid further disruptions. The submission was assigned to Volume 1, Issue 1 of the Journal, which is set to launch on December 20, 2023.

Christopher Boone does not merely providing descriptions of events; he restructures events based on his cognitive ordering of the world, where he finds comfort in systems of order, routine, and mathematical certainty. The book is clearly organized in chapters divided by prime numbers. This is an example of a system and structure that holds more value in logic than in providing a linear progression of a story. This decision on the part of the author challenges the value systems that, in the field of disability studies, systematically dominant the narratives of the so-called neurotypical world and, in turn, authors the choice of cognitive systems as legitimate narrative systems (Haddon).

The book also illustrates the phenomenon of socially oriented perception, as opposed to perception that is solely individual. In this case, the perception that is socially constructed through the lens of neurodiversity is evident in the author's character Christopher's discomfort in the presence of the socially designed environments that are comfortable for neurotypical individuals. Crowds of people in public train stations, in the streets and other public places are detrimental to him because of his discomfort, not merely for the presence of the crowd, but for the overwhelming presence of information. This passage illustrates Oliver's assertion that a person's disability stems from the socially constructed environments that do not take into account bodily and cognitive differences. In this instance, the author has illustrated that socially constructed perception is relational and that socially constructed perception is influenced by and is a function of space, structure, and social norms.

Furthermore, Christopher's perception of the moral world, more particularly, his lack of comprehension of social lies, illustrates the moral

absolutism of the perception of truth in the world, which, for him, is based on an unyielding order of predictability and stability. He believes that "telling lies is wrong" because it brings disorder to the world (Haddon). The majority of society views lying as acceptable and sometimes even congratulates people for lying, but this book shows how lying is destabilizing and wrong. This book critiques moral frameworks where emotions win out over clarity and uses the moral tradition of a-dynamics to affirm neuro divergent ethics as rational and coherent, rather than rigid, frameworks.

The book encourages readers to see their own biases. Readers are encouraged to see things through Christopher's eyes, and Haddon challenges readers to break out of the pattern of reading driven by empathy and reading metaphorically. Christopher's thought process is logical and rational, and readers are expected to provide the intellectual effort to understand him rather than be frustrated by Christopher. Typically, people expect that it is disabled persons who need to be adaptable to the ableist society; this is an example of the narrative reversal, that's why it illustrates the "redistribution of interpretive labour" that is prominently discussed in Disability Studies (Shuttleworth et al.).

Christopher displays how, in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, intellect can be multiple and contextual. Christopher's profound and exceptional social capacity is as equally unsettling as his profound social incapacity, and this distance undermines singular, hierarchical models of intelligence. The novel avoids oversimplifications of ability versus disability, offering instead a spectrum of cognitive diversities. Haddon positions disability not as a form of exclusion, but as a way of fostering new understandings, by emphasizing knowing through perception.

Conclusion

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time is a powerful contribution to the field of Disability Studies, as it engages with normative understandings of disability and intelligence. Haddon illustrates, through the character of Christopher Boone, that the



construction of “normalcy” is a social, and more specifically, an ethnic construction (Davis 24). Haddon’s Boone is an embodiment of rationality, order, structure, and fact, challenging the dominant reliance on emotional rationality and metaphorical thought in their conception of the limits of what it means to be human. The social model of disability finds a strong ally in Haddon’s representation of social and communicative barriers as disabling phenomena. Christopher’s cognitive thought patterns are not the problem; instead, the problem lies within the social and institutional barriers that are ill-equipped to embrace and accommodate a divergent cognitive style, firmly situating disability as a social construction (Oliver 11). The text’s center stage of a neurodivergent storyteller, as well as its use of non-traditional narrative strategies, invites readers to recalibrate their expectations when it comes to the process of meaning making. In the end, as the author notes, Haddon’s work restates the need for inclusivity as a positive change that is more constructive than a negative change (Haddon; Shuttleworth et al.). Incorporating these shifts in representation validates the disabled ways of knowing, as outlined by Garland-Thomson (Garland-Thomson 7). Finally, reframing disability as an epistemological, rather than a deficit, concept serves to reinforce the inclusive construction and perceptual shifts as crystallized in Haddon’s novel.

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