

ABSTRACT

Telling Our Story: A Literary Analysis of Disability Narratives

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This thesis seeks to answer the question: what are the best practices when creating a narrative about disability? To answer this question, I analyze the development of disability narratives throughout four novels written over the last century; *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner, *The Curious Incident of the Dog at Night-time* by Mark Haddon, *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. The first two novels feature a first person narration of disability, a character with a disability serves as the narrator of at least part of the novel. The second two novels feature a third person narration of disability, a non-disabled narrator telling the story of someone with a disability. I find that the best narrative practices utilize first person narrations, avoid counterproductive narrative tropes such as the kill or cure trope and techniques such as disability as a narrative prosthesis, and otherwise provide as realistic an image of disability as possible in a work of fiction.

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TELLING OUR STORY: A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF DISABILITY NARRATIVES

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iii
Chapter One: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: The Sound and the Fury.	16
Chapter Three: The Curious Incident of the Dog in Night-time	33
Chapter Four: Of Mice and Men	49
Chapter Five: To Kill a Mockingbird	59
Chapter Six: Conclusion	74
Bibliography.	90

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

How do I tell my story? I have asked myself this question many times. Does my experience with disability define who I am or is it just one aspect of my story? I have dealt with a variety of different disabilities throughout my life ever since I was a child. My struggle with disability and how to tell my own story forms the basis of this thesis. In this thesis, I seek to answer the question: what are the best practices when creating a narrative about disability? To answer this question, I turn to literature. Disability appears in literature throughout history, even going back to ancient times. Given the expansive body of literature, I limit my study down to four novels published over the last century; *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner, *The Curious Incident of the Dog at Night-Time* by Mark Haddon, *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee. These four novels were chosen because they provide a picture of the evolution of disability narratives over the last century and also provide a clear division into two groups of novels. The first group of novels are novels that feature a first person narration of disability, a character with a disability serves as the narrator of at least part of the novel. The two novels that fall into this group are *The Sound and the Fury* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog at Night-*

Time. The second group of novels feature a third person narration of disability, a non-disabled narrator telling the story of someone with a disability. Additionally, each of these novels feature characters with intellectual disabilities making them more appropriate for comparison.

Each chapter will begin with a brief description of the novel and its connection to disability. Next, I perform a character analysis of the character(s) with a disability describing the disability and the key characteristics of that character. Then, I present the criticisms of the author's particular narrative approach followed by a response to the criticism. In performing this analysis, I seek to answer the previously mentioned question: what are the best practices when creating a narrative about disability? The goal of a disability narrative, I argue, should be aimed at developing the reader's understanding of the experience of disability and empathy towards those with disabilities. A narrative fails to accomplish this, I argue, if it robs the agency of the person with a disability, dehumanizes them, and/or reinforces existing negative stereotypes about disability. After analyzing these four novels, I argue that the ideal disability narrative should be in the first person perspective of the person with the disability, that it should avoid the traditional tropes of disability, and that it should, to a certain level, provide a realistic picture of disability. At the end of this thesis, after looking at these practices in each of the stories, I use these criteria to tell my story.

Brief History of Disability

Throughout human history, people with disability have existed on the margins of society. This different treatment towards people with disabilities has been given the term ableism. Thomas Hehir in the Harvard Educational Review finds the following description of ableism by scholars before him:

A pervasive system of discrimination and exclusion that oppresses people who have mental, emotional and physical disabilities. . . . Deeply rooted beliefs about health, productivity, beauty, and the value of human life, perpetuated by the public and private media, combine to create an environment that is often hostile to those whose physical, mental, cognitive, and sensory abilities ... fall out of the scope of what is currently defined as socially acceptable. (Hehir 2002).

How do we define what is socially acceptable? The answer to that lies in philosophy and language. The very concept of disability stems from the creation of the term 'human.' People who live physical, intellectual, psychosocial, or any other type of disability have often been deemed to be not fully human or worse, animals with human faces (Gabbard 2015). The idea that there is some sort of norm when it comes to the human body creates then the designation of people deviating from that normal. There is the able body and anything without complete, perfect use and command over what are considered to be normal abilities for a person are then deemed disabled. More troubling is the answer of many philosophers to the question of what makes humans different from animals. The longstanding tradition in philosophy

ranging from Plato to Kant is that humanity's ability to reason distinguishes us from animals (Jensen-Moulton 2012). This becomes problematic when people begin talking about intellectual disability. Individuals with intellectual disabilities have often been regarded as unable to form rational thoughts or to reason thus rendering them as inhuman (Jensen-Moulton 2012). Philosophy has not been the only discipline to contribute to the exclusion of people with different abilities.

Language has played a prominent role in shaping conceptions of disability and negative representations still in effect today. As previously mentioned, the terms human and (dis)able have inherent implications that have been used to segregate those with different abilities. The prefix dis- meaning "not" creates a binary that one is either abled or not abled. Further, many of the designations created to describe disabilities have negative connotations. Historically speaking, terms to designate disability status include "cripple, abnormal, retard, idiot, incompetent, lunatic, delinquent, deviant, feeble-minded, and special"; and nondisability status: "normal, competent, fit, and citizen" (Burch and Nielsen 2015). Many of the words used to describe someone with a disability have found their way into everyday language as insults or to describe something as negative. Take the term "cripple" for example; just as someone may call someone with a physical disability a cripple, they may also turn around and use that term to describe

insurmountable doubt or a collapsing economy. Similarly, the term “idiot” which was once used to designate someone with an intellectual disability is often hurled at people as an insult implying that they acted in a way that someone with an intellectual disability would therefore making them bad or less human.

This marginalization of people with disabilities has manifested itself in very real policies taken by states throughout history. Perhaps the darkest of all of these times is the 20th century and the rise of the eugenics movement. Without even looking at the actual implementation of the policy, the very idea behind eugenics is terrifying to someone with a disability. Eugenics sought in its most modest form to prevent the reproduction of those deemed not to be the ideal human, or rather those deemed disabled. The eugenics movement took the world by storm (Broberg and Roll-Hansen 1996). Scientists from all over the world turned the prejudice against people with disabilities into a science of exclusion and used this supposed science to justify exclusionary practices and policies (Friedlander 2001). The United States introduced institutions and legislation to limit the reproduction of certain populations. California even sterilized over 21,000 people with disabilities (Jensen-Moulton 2012). The Scandinavian countries, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, had sterilization policies on the books in some cases through the 70s resulting in the sterilization of 56,075, many of whom had a

disability (Broberg and Roll-Hansen 1996). Forced sterilization would by any standard be considered a violation of basic human rights today. However, sterilization was not the worst the world has seen.

The role of disability in the Holocaust is often overlooked. After he rose to power, prior to the round up and murder of the gypsies and the Jewish people, Hitler murdered those with disabilities as explained by Henry Friedlander:

The murder of the handicapped preceded the murder of Jews and Gypsies, and it is therefore reasonable to conclude that T4's killing operation served as a model for the final solution. The success of the euthanasia policy convinced the Nazi leadership that mass murder was technically feasible, that ordinary men and women were willing to kill large numbers of innocent human beings, and that the bureaucracy would cooperate in such an unprecedented enterprise. (Friedlander 1995).

The guinea pigs for Hitler's mass extermination policy were people with disabilities. Once he knew he could get away with killing them without pushback, Hitler could engage in mass murder on a large scale. What made this possible, was the widespread eugenics at the beginning of the century (Friedlander 2001). A concept that comes out of this time is that of the mercy death, the idea that people with disabilities need to be put out of their misery because they must obviously be suffering if they are not 'normal' so the best, most merciful solution is euthanasia, put them down like a dog (Friedlander 2001). The world has progressed since then and found new ways to hide

violence toward the disabled body. Today, an estimated 90% of babies testing positive for Down Syndrome are aborted (Cha 2018). In everyday life, ableism manifests itself in “societal attitudes that uncritically assert that it is better for a child to walk than to roll, speak than sign, read print than read Braille, spell independently than use a spell-check, and hang out with nondisabled kids as oppose to other disabled kids” (Hehir 2002). While this thesis is not a policy paper or proposal, it is critical to understand the context in which many of these novels were written.

Models of Disability

In addition to the brief history of disability, it is important to understand the different models of disability that have been and are at times still used today to describe disability as they will provide necessary background to the novels analyzed in this thesis. There are four main models of disability; moral, medical, social, and universal (Hinkson 2014; Schur, Blanck, and Kruse 2013). The moral model of disability views disability as a sin, evil, or a test of faith (Hinkson 2014; Schur, Blanck, and Kruse 2013). The prevalence of disability in holy texts such as the Bible underlie this model. Out of all the models, this is arguably the oldest model for viewing disability. Under this model something such as the birth of a child with a disability or the sudden onset of a disability would be viewed as a sign of sin

or a test of someone's faith similar to how Job is tested in the Bible. Some would take it even further and say that disability was a sign of demonic possession depending on the disability or some spawn of the devil (Schur, Blanck, and Kruse 2013). In literature, disability may be used as a sign of moral impairment such as is the case with Shakespeare's *Richard III* or interpreted to be a punishment when it is the disability of a child such as in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. This model of disability demonstrates at best a very primitive understanding of disability.

The medical model departs from the moral model and brings science into the discussion. The medical model views disability as clinical, something that needs to be fixed or cured (Hinkson 2014; Schur, Blanck, and Kruse 2013). There are both positives and negatives to this model. The application of science to disability and the drive to find a cure has advanced science greatly. Diseases like Polio have been eradicated. The resources available for people with disabilities is far above what they were in the past (GBD 2017). However, this model has also been taken to justify extreme policies. As seen in the eugenics movement, scientists thought they could eliminate disability through genetic control and manipulation going as far as forced sterilization, or in the case of Hitler the eradication of people with disabilities. The kill or cure trope of disability in literature arises from this model of disability; that people with disabilities need to be killed if they cannot be cured (Loftis 2015b;

Jensen-Moulton 2012). Examples of this trope could include the ‘mercy killing’ of a character with a disability. Other examples of this model’s influence on literature could be seen in the institutionalization of a character with a disability such as Kesey’s *One Flew over the Cuckoo’s Nest*. While this model advances the scientific understanding of disability which has produced many innovations to the benefit of people with disabilities, it ignores many other aspects of disability such as the social impact or how science has been used to hurt people with a disability.

The social model takes another step forward and is a more recent model of disability. The social model of disability views disability as a social, cultural, and political phenomenon (Hinkson 2014; Schur, Blanck, and Kruse 2013). The exploration into the role of language in creating disability falls into this model. It is not necessarily that a person’s ‘disability’ disables them but rather society through their designation of that person as disabled and the segregation of that person from society due to a lack of accessibility (Schur, Blanck, and Kruse 2013). While a person may have an impairment, the actual ‘disability’ comes from society. The strengths of this model is that it identifies a political strategy, removing barriers, and helps to empower people with disabilities by replacing a traditional focus on individual deficits with an understanding of social oppression (Schur, Blanck, and Kruse 2013). The weaknesses are that it assumes people with disabilities are

automatically oppressed in society and fails to acknowledge the full impact that impairments may have on an individual (Schur, Blanck, and Kruse 2013). This model and the universal model are agreed within the field to be the two best models to look at disability through.

The universal model is the most recent model when it comes to disability. It views disability as existing on a spectrum across one's life span arguing that almost everyone at some time will experience disability in some capacity in their life even if that is just a result of aging (Schur, Blanck, and Kruse 2013). This is the most inclusive model of disability in terms of political and social organization. The most significant strength of this model of disability is that it makes political involvement more widespread and by also attracting allies who may not currently be experiencing a disability but have at some point or who see the value in promoting disability rights as they will likely need those rights later on in life (Schur, Blanck, and Kruse 2013). The most significant weakness of this model is that it can lessen the solidarity that people who have already experienced a disability may feel with the group since anyone can be in that category.

Disability Studies Literature

While the field of disability studies is relatively new, the portrayal of disability in literature is not. Disability can be found in everything from Homer to Shakespeare to Harper Lee (Hinkson 2014; D. Mitchell and Snyder 2015). Disability is inextricably part of the human experience and so naturally it appears in literature. Often, disability is used in literature as an opportunistic metaphorical device, a narrative prosthesis as it has been described by Mitchell and Snyder, to advance the plot or serve as a barometer for the community or people around the character with a disability (D. T. Mitchell and Snyder 2001). Instead of letting a character with a disability simply exist as a character with a disability, the disability is used by authors to serve some narrative purpose.

Hinkson provides an account of the different ways disability in literature has appeared over the years. In the 1800s into the early 1900s, texts featured young disabled children like *A Christmas Carol* who could not either walk, see, or had some sort of illness. Writers at this time did not attempt to provide an accurate depiction of the life of someone with a disability. Instead, they focus on creating a framework of warm and affectionate family stories teaching readers how to overcome selfishness and conform to traditional roles (Hinkson 2014). Mitchell and Snyder add that during this time American writers reject the traditional European forms of

disability in narratives but in turn structures their narratives on the imperfections of characters. This transitions into pre-WWI and then continues on until the 50s. This period starting just before WWI created two categories for characters with disabilities, either the evil villain or the saintly individual. Following WWI, modernism begins to influence disability narratives with works like Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* and Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio* representing the modernist take on disability as they use disability to judge the bigotry and moral failings of society at the time (D. Mitchell and Snyder 2015). This period in the literature utilizes the narrative prosthesis technique in its writings as a character's disability must serve some larger narrative purpose.

The next stage identified by Hinkson follows WWII in the 50's. This period turns to a more realistic depiction of disability (Hinkson 2014). During this time the social model begins to develop as the civil rights movement begins as well. The problem during this time period in literature are joyless narratives with confusing messages due to a lack of understanding of disability. Later in the 60s and 70s, narratives become more complex, involve more interconnected issues like gender and race, but still portray the characters with disabilities as outsiders (Hinkson 2014). The trope of characters existing on the edge of society is present during this time period in literature as characters are often in a marginal role. Additionally, disability

becomes an anchor for other minority statuses as well such as race whereby writers use disability to indicate the debilitating effects of discrimination or violence stemming from that other minority status (D. Mitchell and Snyder 2015). The problem during this time is that people with disabilities are still on the outside. As Mitchell and Snyder indicate, people with disabilities exist on the periphery of peripheries because they are socially off-limits but cannot register as an economic substratum (D. Mitchell and Snyder 2015). The negative portrayals still exist in literature as well during this time with the same negative tropes persisting.

There has been a significant amount of research into the use of disability in fiction. Dr. Jen Scott Curwood provides a thorough review of the existing research in this area. Scholars have tended to focus on the portrayal of individuals with disabilities recently (Curwood 2013). Some scholars have ventured into the realm of young adult literature looking in a more general context (Curwood 2013). Scholars have also specialized in their research looking at each type of disability and how that specific type is portrayed in literature. Interesting enough, there has been considerable more research done on representations of disability in children's picture books than adolescent fiction (Curwood 2013). It could be that children's books play an important developmental role so more research has gone into examining the depiction of characters in children's books than books targeting a more adult

demographic. Koss and Teale provide a quantitative analysis of the prevalence of disability in young adult literature finding that over half the disabilities represented in young adult literature are mental illness, a quarter physical disability, and a quarter featuring disability as a result of disease (Koss and Teale 2009). This quantitative analysis makes it appear as though young adult literature does not regularly feature intellectual disability. It could also be that Koss and Teale place intellectual disability in one of those three categories instead of making it its own category of disability. Koss and Teale do not describe their method in regards to identifying and categorizing disability. Many other elements of children's books and some fiction have been studied by others such as imagery, setting, plot, point of view, style, and illustrations to see how they impact disability (Curwood 2013). Further research has gone on to explore the characterization of characters with a disability and positive and negative portrayals based on that (Curwood 2013). However, not much research has been done on constructing a disability narrative. Most work has been on what authors have done wrong in how they portrayed disability. There is a gap in the literature when it comes to the perspective of the narration, first versus third person, and the effects that it has. Neither method has been substantively compared to the other in fiction. My thesis locates itself in this gap. By analyzing the four novels in this thesis, I seek to fill some of that gap with a comparison of

first and third person narrations over the last 100 years. Further research is needed on this topic as there are many more novels out there to be analyzed in such a way.

Organization

In Chapter Two, I analyze William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. This is the oldest of the four novels selected. I selected this novel because it is one of the first, if not the first, novel to employ first person narration of disability. I use that as a starting point for examining the best narrative practices since I argue that first person narration is one of the best practices. With Faulkner, I find his use of first person narration admirable and productive towards the narrative goals mentioned earlier. I find the productive value of first person narration in this novel dampened by other negative aspects of the novel such as the use of disability as a narrative prosthesis and the overall negative attitude of Faulkner towards disability.

In Chapter Three, I analyze the most recent of the four novels, Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. This novel employs first person narration throughout the entirety of the novel. In my analysis, I find this novel to be the most productive in its narration due to its

use of first person, realistic depiction, and avoidance of negative narrative techniques such as narrative prosthesis. I find the real world impact of this novel to support this argument.

In Chapter Four, I analyze John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. This novel follows shortly after Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. Steinbeck uses a third person narration of disability in this novel providing a comparison to Faulkner's work. I argue that this novel moves disability several steps back due to its problematic nature. I find Steinbeck heavily influenced by the eugenics movement that dominated his time and this influence manifests itself in his very negative portrayal of a character with a disability. Similar to Chapter Three, I find the real world impact of Steinbeck's novel supports the notion that Steinbeck's negative portrayal set disability rights back in America.

In Chapter Five, I analyze Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. This book places itself chronologically in the middle of these four novels. Lee also uses a third person narration of disability throughout the novel. I select this book because of the significance this book holds in American literature and civil rights. Harper Lee's novel has received significant attention for its discussion of race, but it similarly attempts to address disability. I find Harper Lee has very admirable intentions, but those intentions do not make up for the depiction of disability in the novel. I argue Harper Lee utilizes

disability as a narrative prosthesis, that she fills to engage or provide a voice to the other, and creates a harmful picture of people with disabilities.

In Chapter Six, I conclude this thesis by presenting and comparing my findings from each of the chapters. I find that the best narrative practices utilize first person narrations, avoid counterproductive narrative techniques such as disability as a narrative prosthesis, and otherwise provide as realistic an image of disability as possible in a work of fiction. I then employ these narrative techniques to tell my own story.

CHAPTER TWO

The Sound and the Fury

In this chapter, I examine the use of characters with disabilities as narrators of the novel in which they are written. While the use of characters with disabilities has been featured in literature since the beginning of time, the use of characters with disabilities as narrators is a relatively recent trend in American literature, most notable is William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*. Faulkner uses the character Benjy Compson, a character with an intellectual disability, as the narrator for part of his book. Other works have taken up characters with disabilities as narrators such as Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* or Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Kesey's novel describing the conditions of a mental asylum is told through a patient at the asylum. Haddon's narrator is thirteen year-old Christopher John Francis Boone who has an intellectual disability. In this chapter, I begin examining texts with characters with disabilities as narrators with an analysis of Faulkner's Benjy. Using this text to develop a model for characters with disabilities as narrators, I will argue that this model is significantly more positive and productive than having other characters narrate about a character with a disability as it gives the power of

narration to a group typically silenced and forces the reader to see the world through the lens of a person with a disability.

Benjy Compson

William Faulkner's *The Sound and The Fury* has long held a prominent place in the disability literature due to its character Benjy Compson, a character who has cognitive disabilities. The novel takes place during the early 1900's primarily in the post-Civil War South. The four chapters from the novel are each told by a different narrator recounting specific times or events impacting the Compson family. Benjamin Compson, referred to as Benjy, is the first narrator of the novel. It is through Benjy that Faulkner introduces disability into the novel. Benjy is a character with some sort of intellectual disability.¹ While the exact disability is never made clear nor diagnosed in the novel, the novel, interviews with Faulkner, and the appendix later written and attached to the novel by Faulkner make it clear

¹ While other characters can be read as having disabilities, Benjy is the chief representation of disability in the novel. Jost argues each Compson family member can be read as having a disability, from depression to alcoholism. I choose to focus on Benjy and not the others primarily because Benjy has the most significant and recognizable disability. Other readings of disability require a deeper reading and more inferences which I seek to avoid. While it is important to recognize all disabilities, characterizing any deviation from the ideal human as a disability and applying that to an analysis of narrative in literature, that drastically changes what disability narratives actually are and undermines the significance of many great works and advances in this field.

that Benjy does not process things the same as everybody else. Benjy cannot speak or fully express himself to others. Benjy does not remember things the same as other characters as seen in his storytelling, which will be discussed in more detail later. As Faulkner describes in the appendix when Benjy was eventually committed to the state asylum, he “lost nothing then either because, as with his sister, he remembered not the pasture but only its loss, and firelight was still the same bright shape of sleep” (340). Benjy’s disability prevents him from being wholly self-sufficient and actually makes him rather dependent on others for his basic needs. Because of this, Benjy lives at the family home where he is cared for primarily and most consistently by the family’s African-American house worker Dilsey. Throughout the novel, those living at the house come and go depending on their chronological place in the Compson’ story, but a few are relatively constant. Dilsey, her husband Roskus, children Frony and T.P., and grandchild Luster all live on the Compson property. Benjy had three siblings, Caddy, Jason, who eventually commits him to the state asylum, and Quentin who all lived at the Compson family home with their mother, Mrs. Compson, at some point. Jason stays at the house throughout the novel. Caddy moves away after she gets married. Quentin moves away to Harvard for college. Caddy’s daughter Quentin Jr. also grows up at the Compson family home before running away with a boy from the traveling circus show.

The Compson family is far from perfect and it is in this setting that Benjy's story takes place. Benjy is the subject of violence and abuse in the novel as numerous characters throughout the novel will intentionally provoke him into a fit, he is sterilized, and his own brother Jason has him committed to the state asylum after Mrs. Compson passes away. In all of this, William Faulkner's Benjy displays three distinct concepts in the novel that are central to the understanding of Benjy's place in the disability literature. These concepts include Benjy's temporal leaps, Benjy's animalistic connotations, and Benjy's biblical associations (Bérubé 2005). The first of the concepts, the temporal leaps of Benjy, comes from the actual narration of Benjy in the first chapter of the novel. Any reader of *The Sound and The Fury* has experienced the difficulty and, at times, near incomprehensibility of that first chapter. The animalistic characterization of Benjy can be seen through different descriptions throughout the novel, more notably through the observations of other characters and narrators in the novel and their interactions with Benjy. Similarly, the biblical associations of Benjy with sin and punishment can be seen through the matriarch of the Compson family and her descriptions and lamentations about Benjy.

That first concept, the temporal leaps of Benjy, is readily apparent to the reader. What these temporal leaps mean is that Benjy's narration does not have a logical chronological progression of ideas or memories typically

found in narratives. Benjy as a narrator does not use time as the ordering principle of his section as it seems as though that is not how Benjy thinks or remembers. This can be seen through the presence of Caddy in the events in Benjy's narrative. Through the other chapters and the appendix it is made clear that Caddy eventually is forced to leave the Compson home once she gets married, but in Benjy's narrative, Caddy will be present at home on one page and then characters will remark that she is not at home on the next page and then she will suddenly be home again. As mentioned above, Faulkner writes that Benjy does not necessarily remember people or things but remembers the loss of them. Instead of using time, Benjy remembers through his other senses. The sense of smell, the sense of touch, and sense of sight seem to be the manner in which Benjy remembers events. This can be seen in a couple different ways. One powerful memory tool for Benjy seems to be the smell of trees and flowers. Benjy connects different memories across time through the scents he associates with those memories. One particular 'flower' that seems to carry significance for Benjy is the Jimson Weed. Just holding this calms Benjy down and plays a prominent role in many of his memories as Faulkner establishes early on (6). Benjy noticeably connects the scent of trees and flowers with people, more specifically his sister Caddy. Numerous times Benjy mentions that Caddy "smells like trees" (9, 42-43) or having flowers in her hair (39). Additionally, Benjy's sister Caddy plays a

very important role in Benjy's story telling. Benjy's memories all seem to involve Caddy. Caddy teaches Benjy about concepts he does not seem to understand by relating things to sensations. Cold is shown through feeling ice (13). Hot is shown by holding out his hands and feeling the warmth of the fire. Further, once Caddy leaves, Benjy clings on to that memory and still seems to be looking for Caddy. When the golfers are playing golf and call out "caddie" Benjy appears triggered by this and numerous characters comment on Benjy searching for Caddy after she has left (3, 51). Additionally, Benjy connects to Caddy and carries on that memory through her slipper that is left behind (60, 70). Touching the slipper has the power to calm Benjy down once he starts a fit and similarly comes up frequently whenever Benjy is narrating or appearing in another character's narrative. The sense of sight plays a prominent role in Benjy's narrative as he remembers shapes and colors of things. One prominent example is the firelight mentioned previously as being the same color as sleep. He describes going outside as going from bright cold to dark cold (8). In another description, Benjy says "the shapes flowed on. The ones on the other side began again, bright and fast and smooth, like when Caddy says we are going to sleep" (12). Colors and shapes continue to be referenced by Benjy in most of his descriptions of events as if he is remembering the event or connecting it to another event by the colors and

shapes present. The importance of Benjy's other senses cannot be overlooked as they fill the void of time in his narrative.

The second concept, Benjy's animal comparison, can be seen partly through explicit comparisons, but primarily through the implicit animalistic behavioral comparisons of Benjy in the text. Explicitly, Benjy is compared to animals such as a pig due to how he eats (70). Implicitly, comparisons are drawn between Benjy and other animals like a dog. One such way this connection is drawn is by keeping Benjy out of the house and out of site. Throughout the novel, whenever Benjy is having a fit or the characters do not wish to deal with him, they send him outside or have someone go play with him outside much like people do with household pets or domesticated animals (37). The description of Benjy's actions outdoors draw similar comparisons as he is described as running along the fence and slobbering all over, especially when people come by. There is one instance when he chases after some girls walking on the other side of the fence. They lock the gate so "he can't get out" and one character says "he won't hurt you... he just runs along the fence" (53). In different instances, Benjy's interactions with different objects as him slobbering over the objects once again drawing a comparison to a dog who are commonly described as slobbering over things such as tennis balls. The sterilization of Benjy suggests Benjy's disability justifies the treatment of him as an animal whom the owners or society do not want to reproduce and is

thus sterilized. During the time that Faulkner was writing *The Sound and the Fury*, the eugenics movement was sweeping across the world with people with cognitive disabilities being the prime target for sterilization just like animals. Out of any context, this event could very well be describing a dog or some other such animal. An author of Faulkner's talent would not have these descriptions of Benjy if it were not to draw the comparison of Benjy to an animal such as a dog.

The third notable concept of Benjy is the biblical associations of Benjy as a manifestation of sin or God's punishment of Mrs. Compson which is seen throughout the novel in her descriptions and lamentations of Benjy.

Following from the moral model of disability, Benjy's name represents the significance of religion to Mrs. Compson and way it shapes her view of Benjy. Benjy's original name is Maury, named after his uncle, but Mrs. Compson changes it to Benjamin, a biblical name, shortly after fully realizing the disability of Benjy because she is too proud for him to have the family name taken by someone with such a disability as Benjy's (58). The name Benjamin has long held important biblical significance as it is one of the twelve tribes of Israel, but the actual meaning of the name is what is used by Mrs. Compson. Benjamin was Jacob's last son. He was originally to be named *Ben-Oni* meaning 'son of my sorrow, pain or distress', depending on the

interpretation², by his mother who would die in childbirth, but Jacob changes the name to Benjamin after the passing of Rachel meaning son of my right hand and son of the south (Muscato n.d.; Warshauer n.d.; Easton 1897). Mrs. Compson does not hide the fact that she views Benjy as a sort of punishment for her sins. She claims Benjy is a judgment upon her which Benjy recounts in his narrative (12). Throughout the other chapters of the novel, that viewpoint is further developed. In Quentin's chapter, she laments, "what have I done to have been given children like these Benjamin was punishment enough... I thought Benjamin was punishment enough for any sins I have committed I thought he was my punishment for putting aside my pride and marrying a man who held himself above me" (102-103). To Mrs. Compson, Benjy represents whatever sins she committed in her past. This view carries the notion that the burden of caring for someone with a disability, especially a cognitive one like Benjy's is so burdensome that it must be a punishment from God.

² Scottish minister Matthew George Easton, author of Easton's Bible Dictionary, uses the interpretation son of my pain. Cristopher Muscato, M.A. in history, uses the interpretation son of my sorrow. The Jewish Theological Seminary uses the interpretation son of my distress.

Criticisms

The criticisms of *The Sound and The Fury* primarily stem from the motive or purpose of using the character of Benjy in the novel and the three concepts previously discussed. One argument is that Faulkner did not actually care about writing something for disability studies or to make any sort of progress in disability rights. One cannot ignore the rhetoric of Faulkner in his answers to different interviews he participated in. Faulkner references Benjy as “that idiot child” or the idiot or other such terms during interviews that, if they were used today, would be considered derogatory in nature (Gwynn and Blotner 1957). In addition to descriptive terms ascribed to Benjy, he also gave answers that, rather explicitly, dehumanize the character of Benjy. In one particular interview with Jean Stein, Faulkner gives the following problematic answer about Faulkner’s feelings towards Benjy:

The only emotion I can have for Benjy is grief and pity for all mankind. The only thing I can feel about him personally is concern as to whether he is believable as I created him. He was a prologue, like the gravedigger in the Elizabethan dramas. He serves his purpose and is gone. Benjy is incapable of good and evil because he had no knowledge of good and evil...Benjy wasn't rational enough even to be selfish. He was an animal.

Faulkner holds nothing back in his response to Stein’s questions revealing a rather abusive attitude to his very own character with a disability. Faulkner

has received a lot of criticism for this very language which has called into question his purpose of using the character of Benjy as the first narrator in *The Sound and The Fury* (Jost 2017). Mitchell and Snyder introduce the concept of a narrative prosthesis to describe such actions. They argue that authors not only use, but depend on disability as an opportunistic metaphorical device (D. T. Mitchell and Snyder 2001). In the case of Faulkner, the narrative prosthesis would be using Benjy purely to show the moral decay of the Compson household through their treatment of Benjy. If Faulkner does not actually care about Benjy and only wrote Benjy into the novel for his own opportunistic and selfish narrative purposes such as serving for a moral barometer for those around him (D. T. Mitchell and Snyder 2001; Truchan-Tataryn 2005), then indeed some of those criticisms may be fair. If Benjy merely serves the purpose of a narrative prosthesis like critics suggest, then maybe Faulkner's novel is not so praiseworthy.

Truchan-Tatryn adds another dimension to the critique that Benjy's character is not actually a realistic representation of an individual with a intellectual disability and that Benjy is still displayed and described animalistically. One of the great problems of writing in the lens of a person with a intellectual disability is that the author has no way of truly knowing how that individual would think so any expression on behalf of that person cannot be truly representative of that person's experience. At the time

Faulkner was writing, even less about intellectual disability was known or understood. It is perfectly reasonable to believe that Faulkner did not accurately represent the experience of a person with a intellectual disability. In terms of the animalistic description, Faulkner does call Benjy an animal in the interview above. When looking back at the comparisons implicit in the text, it appears as though Faulkner does view Benjy as an animal and wrote him to be read as such. Larson furthers this line of criticism arguing that Faulkner dehumanizes Benjy in order to give sentience and humanity to Benjy (Larson 2014). The animalistic depiction of Benjy, some argue, contributes to the history of people with disabilities as unpredictable and potentially harmful (Jensen-Moulton 2012). These criticisms of Benjy's character make the argument that, under these conditions, Faulkner actually reinforces the negative attitude towards and abuse of disability in the literature and in philosophy preceding him rather than challenge them.

Additionally, use of the moral model by the Mrs. Compson in the novel carries potential negative consequences. Benjy's representation of sin or a punishment to his family further dehumanizes him (Loftis 2015a). Benjy is a curse rather than a human being. His name demonstrates an unstable identity and his mother's attempt to cast that curse out of the family (Loftis 2015a). Benjy serves as a symbol for all curses; it is the original curse on the Compson family that presages Quentin's suicide and Caddy's pregnancy

(Loftis 2015a). Returning to the idea of Benjy as narrative prosthesis, all that can matter about Benjy appears to be the meanings and interpretations thrown onto him i.e. the curse of disability.

Another criticism is the inaccessibility of the text. This stems from the temporal leaps taken by Benjy and the rather unusual nature of his narrative that challenges the reader from the beginning of the novel, “even professional critics and literary scholars admit the challenge Faulkner’s narrative technique poses for them as readers” (Kuminova 2010). If professional critics and scholars have difficulty reading *The Sound and the Fury*, then the text presents a tremendous burden to the reader to overcome. Some argue that Benjy’s chapter should be moved farther back in the novel or that the appendix should come before Benjy’s section to make it easier to understand the novel (Rome n.d.). Regardless of where Benjy’s narrative is placed in the novel, Benjy’s narrative presents potential barriers the reader must overcome in regards to the temporal leaps taken by Benjy.

Response

While these criticisms certainly raise legitimate concerns over Faulkner’s work and may in fact detract from the overall impact of the novel, one cannot ignore the positive effects of *The Sound and The Fury*. First, in

response to the intent of Faulkner in the creation of Benjy, focusing on the intent of the author does not necessarily matter (Holler and Kirsch 2015). Rather, the impact of the reader reading the text, reading through the lens of Benjy, is more important than whether or not the author intended a certain response to occur (Harker 88). Simply because the author may have potentially negative attitudes towards individuals with disabilities, creating a chapter that forces one to read from the standpoint of a character with significant cognitive disabilities does in fact impact the reader and does so in a positive manner. While the use of narrative prosthesis is certainly a concern and should be avoided as it may lessen the agency of the character with a disability, the potential negative impact from it does not override everything else in the novel, especially if the novel uses first person narration. Narrative prosthesis may shift the focus away from the character with a disability but placing the reader in the position of the character with a disability through first person narration still forces the reader see the world as that character sees and experiences it thereby building some empathy and restoring some agency.

Second, in response to the dehumanization of Benjy, Truchan-Tatryn concedes, “reinterpreting Benjy, problematizing the idea of absence of thought in a conscious individual as a realistic possibility, invites a deeper consideration of the need to engage with diversity in human experience and

its textual representation” (Truchan-Tataryn 2005). Even if there is some dehumanization and some potential misrepresentation of what an intellectual disability actually looks like, this forces the reader to respond by engaging the question of what it means to be human by exploring a range of human experience. Simply giving Benjy words and thoughts gives him narrative power otherwise excluded from people with cognitive disabilities which readers are forced to struggle. Allowing Benjy to think challenges the philosophical exclusion of people with disabilities from humanity.

Third, in response to the inaccessibility of the text, this can actually be read to be a positive of the novel rather than a negative. Benjy’s temporal leaps are not barriers to reading but rather evidence of super narrative powers Benjy possesses as he is able to make spatial and emotional associations across time displaying a still powerful memory despite the temporal leaps (Bérubé 2005). As discussed previously, Benjy is still able to recall memories, he just does so in a different way than others typically do. Benjy connects memories through different senses and associations he has rather than rely on time as is typical with narratives which demonstrates those super narrative powers. While critics may respond that the formidable memory of Benjy may still just be a narrative tool and that it actually further diminishes Benjy to simply being a narrative prosthesis, there is still reason to ignore some of this skepticism and criticism of Faulkner (Bérubé 2005).

Rather than diminish the humanity of Benjy and the use of Benjy in *The Sound and the Fury*, the inaccessibility makes Benjy significant. As Ellison argues in *Invisible Man* that democracy and narration converge, so to can Benjy be read to actually enable the democratization of narration by extending the power of narration to groups not typically given that power (Bérubé 2005). People with disabilities are rarely given the power to tell their own story in part because their disability may inhibit their ability to narrate, especially in the case of individuals with cognitive disabilities. Benjy, who cannot effectively communicate with others in the novel, is given the power to narrate that he otherwise would not have. In writing this way, Benjy can be used to explore narrative self-consciousness rather than threaten it (Bérubé 2005). Even if Faulkner did not intend for the character of Benjy to serve such a productive role, Benjy nonetheless does.

Additionally, there is evidence that perhaps Faulkner's intentions are not so nefarious in regards to the character of Benjy. One of Faulkner's goals for *The Sound and the Fury* was to overcome the impossible, "to overcome the grammatical and pragmatic limits of language and annihilate the distance between writer and reader." (Kuminova 2010). The primary manner in which Faulkner can be seen doing this is in the writing of Benjy. While it is true that other sections, namely Quentin's chapter, present accessibility problems to the reader and grammatical limits are certainly stretched, speaking

through a character who normally cannot narrate challenges the limits of language on communication. Benjy's experiences are impossibly communicable because of his inability to communicate with others, yet he is at the same time he seems to be the ideal communicator for this novel through his ability to make spatial and emotional associations across time in a novel whose characters are so concerned with the past (Kuminova 2010; Bérubé 2005). In addition to the memory aspect, the reliability of Benjy's account as compared to others is also worth noting. Each narrator in the novel have difficulty communicating their message and despite Benjy's inability to verbally communicate in the novel, his narration still may be more reliable and trustworthy of the actual events at the Compson household (Rome n.d.). The use of Benjy and the inaccessibility is deliberate on Faulkner's part and while he may not view Benjy as equally human as himself, it is only through the character of Benjy that Faulkner can achieve his ideal communication. In fact, it is this very inaccessibility that requires readers to develop empathy for the character of Benjy in order to truly understand Benjy's chapter (Kuminova 2010). While this does appear to be a narrative prosthesis, the intent of Faulkner does not appear necessarily to utterly dehumanize characters with disabilities as they may offer something that Faulkner seeks to achieve. Kuminova elaborates what this ideal of communication looks like:

Faulkner's ideal of communication could be summed up in one word as fusion—melting together of the signifier and signified (ideally, transforming the whole complex of meanings he wants to communicate into “one word,” as quoted earlier); blending sign and sound, sound and meaning, fusing together the author and the reader—which writing for a “zero audience” practically amounts to—blurring the boundaries between the character and the reader, through the essentially uncritical mechanism of empathy described above. (Kuminova 2010).

Faulkner's ideal of communication would not be possible without the development of empathy. Despite any personal prejudices towards disability Faulkner may have, the novel itself positively impacts readers and makes progress in the field of disability studies.

The power of narration and reading fictional stories like *The Sound and the Fury* cannot be overstated. Telling stories is an inherent part of the human experience. Since the dawn of mankind, humans have been concerned with the telling of one's story. From *Gilgamesh* to Homer, humans have been telling stories. Story telling makes humans unique from other animals. As Waxler argues, “language is a gift to us as unique individuals; it gives us the human world to consider, if we dare to” (Waxler 2014). The power of narration has been studied as well. Studies show that children whose mothers use remembrance narratives were better able to create autobiographical narratives suggesting that narratives play an important role in social interactions as they are how individuals remember social setting and understand social events (Freißmann 2008). The problem with

this is that historically not everyone has been included in storytelling; not everyone has been given the power of narration. People like Benjy, as discussed, have historically been excluded from this realm of human interaction. This is problematic when storytelling becomes the means that individuals come in contact with the other and develop empathy and love for the other (Waxler 2014). Benjy offers a glimpse into the world of someone with an intellectual disability that otherwise would be excluded. Benjy offers the chance for people with disabilities to gain the power of narration and engage in the human experience of storytelling. Benjy's narrative, while fictional, offers readers a manner in which to develop empathy for people with disabilities and include them into the human literary community. It is not only a recommendation but a responsibility for humans, "to acknowledge others, to listen to their stories, and to offer stories to them. The exchange of stories is an ethical response to the most natural human demand" (Waxler 2014). Faulkner's inclusion of a narrator with a disability is praiseworthy because rather than dehumanize Benjy, the inclusion of his story humanizes Benjy to others. Further, speaking through Benjy as opposed to speaking at Benjy further adds to the development of empathy. The literature suggests that an internal perspective through first-person, self-narration, figural narration, or authorial narration moving inside the minds of many characters best promotes character identification and a reader's empathy (Keen 2007).

This is precisely what Faulkner does that most others up to his time did not do. Instead of taking the common approach of simply having a character with disabilities like Lennie from *Of Mice and Men* or Boo Radley from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Faulkner speaks through the character with a disability optimizing the promotion of empathy for that character.

CHAPTER THREE

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

In this chapter, I continue my analysis on the use of characters with disabilities as narrators of the novel in which they are written. Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* came out in 2003 and quickly achieved widespread acclaim. Like Faulkner, Haddon uses Christopher John Francis Boone, a character with a intellectual disability, (Asperger's per the book jacket), to narrate his novel. Departing from Faulkner, Haddon's only narrator is Christopher. I will argue that Haddon builds upon the model of first person narration started by authors like Faulkner by avoiding some of the criticisms of Faulkner and by forcing the reader to make the uncomfortable decision of what a disability actually is.

Christopher John Francis Boone

Despite its more recent release, Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* has already managed to claim a prominent place in disability literature. Haddon's book is written as a detective fiction novel

in which Christopher, a 13 year-old child in England, takes after one of his heroes, Sherlock Holmes, and decides to investigate the death of a his neighbor's dog. Christopher tells the reader that this story he is telling is part of a project for school he has to do. The novel begins by Christopher finding his neighbor's dog dead with a garden fork in it leading him to the conclusion that the dog was 'murdered.' He decides to take on the role of investigator which ends up getting him in trouble at different times throughout the novel. Eventually, Christopher gets to the bottom of the incident with the dog, but the story does not end here. Christopher becomes aware that his mother (whom he believed to be dead) is living somewhere else in England and he leaves his home with his father to go find his mother. It is this conflict that drives the story of this novel and through which the reader is able to see Christopher's different abilities. Christopher's character has five particular traits or aspects to his character that shed light on his apparent 'dis'-ability.

The first of those five traits is Christopher's inability to understand emotion. Early on in the novel, Christopher himself makes that clear, but also the writing of his narration makes that trait readily apparent as well. In describing the scene of the dog, Wellington, that died, Christopher does not have any emotion in his tone. He describes the scene as it is, Wellington has a garden fork in him and is dead, and what leads Christopher to believe it is a murder that he must investigate. He knocks on his neighbor's door to tell

her that her dog was dead and she immediately accuses him of doing it. In all of this, Christopher does not describe the scene or himself as feeling particularly sad or use really any emotional descriptions. All the descriptions here are rather cold and factual. Later on in the novel, Christopher himself tells the reader that he does not understand emotions and that he is in special education at his school where he learns from his teacher Siobhan how to interact with other people. Christopher uses a scale of different faces he is shown by his teacher to figure out how someone is feeling and what that feeling means. While he personally may not understand that emotion, he knows the facts of the emotion from this. Christopher does not hide or shy away from the fact that he does not understand emotion, and, in fact, actually seems to embrace it. He admits that he does not understand jokes and does not really like other people that much. It is because this lack of emotional understanding on the part of Christopher that has led critics, scholars, and other people to diagnose him with an intellectual disability, in particular, Asperger syndrome (Sandahl 2018; Greenwell 2004). However, Haddon never admits and actually has rejected Christopher having Asperger's or even necessarily having a disability. Haddon provides a few reasons for this. First, since this novel is written from the perspective of Christopher, Christopher does not use the phrase Asperger Syndrome, but rather says he has behavioral problems (Haddon 2015). Asperger Syndrome

is never mentioned during the novel and for it to appear on the cover is regrettable. Haddon prefers to use behavioral problems instead of labelling Christopher with any particular disability because, “[behavioral problems] includes all of us... labels tell us very little about the person who has been labelled and a lot about the people doing the labelling” (Haddon 2015). The second reason Haddon does not like the book jacket labelling Christopher as having Asperger Syndrome is because people have a tendency then to assume the author, Haddon, is trying to make the character, Christopher, representative of all people with a particular disability, Asperger Syndrome, instead of just being one person with a disability or one person with behavioral problems (Haddon 2015). As Haddon feared, criticisms of the representativeness of Christopher are made which will be discussed more under the criticism section.

The second defining aspect of Christopher is his love of math. Christopher is clearly very good at math. His goal throughout the novel is for him to take the test so that he can be in advanced maths and eventually go to university to study physics. Christopher demonstrates his advanced mathematic capabilities throughout the novel as he is able to do very complex math quickly in his head. Take, for instance, the chapters of the book. Instead of going proceeding through the ordinal numbers for each chapter, Christopher chooses to number the chapters according to prime numbers. If

and when Christopher starts to get stressed out or overwhelmed, he will do math in his head, such as cubing numbers, to calm himself down. In fact, in certain instances, when Christopher does become stressed out, as will be discussed a little later in more detail, it is almost like when a computer begins to overheat and needs to cool down. Christopher also has a photographic memory which aids in his mathematical capabilities. He claims that people are somewhat unobservant. He uses the example of being in a car and driving past a field. Most people see the field, see the cows in the field, and other general observations. When Christopher sees a field, he sees exactly 32 cows, each one with a different pattern of spots, he sees three different types of grasses, and this all leads him to conclude that a farmer lives there. The character of Christopher resembles that of Dustin Hoffman's character in the movie *Rainman* who lives at an institute his whole adult life yet has extraordinary math and memory abilities. When a box of matches are spilt he almost immediately knows exactly how many matches there are which leads his brother taking him to Vegas to count cards. This characteristic draws perhaps the most criticism for the novel.

The third aspect of Christopher worth noting is his aversion to being touched. Christopher makes it very clear in the beginning of the novel that he does not like being touched and that when he is touched it can trigger a fit for him. In the beginning when he is investigating the dog and his neighbor calls

the police on Christopher, the cop places his hand on Christopher's shoulder which Christopher does not like at all and so he actually punches the police officer which gets Christopher in more trouble. The police officer takes Christopher to the station where they call his father who then has to explain to the officer why this happened, that Christopher did not mean to punch the officer, but that is how he responds to someone touching him, especially someone he does not know. Even with his parents, Christopher does not like contact. He does not hug his parents. Instead, he and his parents will hold out their hands and interlock their fingers as their method of hugging. While having an aversion to touch does not itself necessarily constitute a disability, but when looking at Christopher as a whole in light of the other aspects of his character, one can see the connection that this has to Christopher's disability and the lack of understanding that those around him have for this aspect of his disability.

The fourth aspect of Christopher's character that connects a lot of the other aspects together is the intense fear of the unknown and unfamiliar. Christopher is someone who has a schedule for everything and likes to follow that schedule. He does not like when something causes some deviation from that schedule. While it is not uncommon to have a schedule and to not like when that schedule is not followed, the triggering effect it has on Christopher appears connected to Christopher's disability. A large part of the novel is

Christopher putting himself in a triggering position by choosing to talk to people he does not know well to investigate the incident of the dog and, more importantly, to travel by himself, runaway in effect, to find his mother. He must find his way to the train station which is outside of his mental map and then navigate himself to the part of England where his mother is which requires him to interact with a lot of people he does not know. This causes him to become very overwhelmed and shut down at different times when it becomes too much for him. As mentioned previously, Christopher's aversion to the unknown seems to go with his photographic memory and his love of math. He needs order and he needs things he knows. When he is in a new place, he takes in so much more information and is trying to process all of that and it is the processing of all that new information that appears to make Christopher undergo a sort of panic attack.

The fifth aspect of Christopher's character relevant to understanding Christopher is the importance of colors. For whatever reason, color is very important to Christopher. The color yellow and related colors like brown are very bad to Christopher. He will not eat or drink anything that is yellow. Additionally, if he sees more yellow cars than red cars on the way to school, then it is going to be a bad day. This seems to go along with Christopher's desire for everything to be clean. He will not use bathrooms if they are unclean. It is usually easy to tell if a bathroom is unclean just by seeing if

there are yellow or brown stains. While this isolated by itself may not necessarily indicate a disability, when taken in conjunction with the other aspects of Christopher's character, it is something worth noting.

Criticisms

The primary criticism of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is Haddon's representation of disability and what effect that representation has on readers. Unlike Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, critics do not question the intentions of Haddon. The narrative prosthesis criticism of Faulkner has not been raised against Haddon. Even though Haddon refuses to diagnose Christopher with any particular disability, he does admit that the novel is about disability (Haddon 2015). Whereas Faulkner's intentions were questionable, Haddon makes his clear so the narrative prosthesis criticism would not carry weight against Haddon if it were raised because disability is not being used for some other narrative purpose such as serving as a measuring stick for society. While Haddon does admit the book is in some manner about people's attitudes toward disability, it differs from typical novels criticized for using disability solely to measure the morality of some character. While Haddon avoids this potential pitfall of disability literature, the concerns about *The Curious Incident of the Dog in*

the Night-Time, which are common in disability literature, still warrant discussion.

Starting with the representation of Christopher, Haddon has been criticized for misrepresenting a character with an intellectual disability and for romanticizing Christopher's disability. In disability literature, as is the case with Faulkner and most, if not all, other writers attempting to create a narrative from the standpoint of someone with a intellectual disability, the author of a novel is coming from a position of privilege in that they themselves do not possess the disability they are writing about. Similarly, Mark Haddon does not possess an intellectual disability, but writes from the perspective of a character with a disability. This becomes problematic because the author then creates a picture of a character based on his own understanding of the disability and not necessarily what that disability is actually like for someone possessing that disability (Talley 2005). A similar critique came up with the character of Benjy Compson and the animalistic and dehumanizing representation of him. Christopher is different than Benjy in that Christopher is not described animalistically or dehumanized, at least explicitly, but rather that Christopher, as the critics suggest, represents someone with an intellectual disability such as Asperger's who may not be representative of everyone who exists with an intellectual disability (Talley 2005). Even if Christopher does accurately represent a person who could exist

with an intellectual disability like Asperger's, he does not represent the wide variety of people with intellectual disabilities and their experience. Since this novel is read as revelatory, this can be problematic as the reader may believe Christopher to be representative of someone on with an intellectual disability despite the great difference between individuals with intellectual disabilities (Talley 2005). Every person and his/her experience is unique so assuming simply that one example of someone with an intellectual disability such as Christopher is representative of everyone else with an intellectual disability can be harmful.

Additionally, Haddon may even feed into some of the stereotypes of a character with an intellectual disability. Society has viewed people with intellectual disabilities as being simple minded, slow, and inferior intellectually. Haddon writes Christopher as being simple-minded by making many of Christopher's thoughts and statements simplistic in nature (Talley 2005). This sort of misrepresentation can create mindblindness, the inability to take on the role of the other (Talley 2005). So, Haddon writing Christopher in such a way could create mindblindness on the part of the readers. The inability to take on the role of the other would undermine the value of this novel if that is indeed the case. If one cannot take on the role of the other, then one cannot develop empathy for the other.

The second area of criticism, the romanticization of disability, can be seen in Christopher's mathematical capabilities. In referring to the romanticization of disability, extreme mathematical capabilities can evoke images and entrench images of someone being a savant simply because they have an intellectual disability (Talley 2005; Hacking 2010). This may seem like a positive and not a negative. However, the over romanticization of disability can lead people to continue to hold basic stereotypes of people with disability possessing some incredible savant-like capability which is not the case. Not everyone with an intellectual disability is a savant. By creating another character similar to Dustin Hoffman's *Rain Man*, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* entrenches the view of its readers that everyone with an intellectual disability is a mathematical savant, leading them to hold people with an intellectual disability to unfair standards (Talley 2005). In reality, not everyone with an intellectual disability is a savant or good at math. The problems associated with misrepresentation apply here as well because romanticization is a form of misrepresentation, albeit a very specific one.

The third and final area of criticism for Haddon is his choice of genre for this novel. Haddon chooses to write this novel in the genre of detective fiction alongside works such as *Sherlock Holmes*. Using a character with an intellectual disability poses some challenges to this. While it is not impossible

to use a character with an intellectual disability to be a detective,³ the choice of Christopher with his specific disability some argue is problematic. With detective fiction, the protagonist needs to be able to solve the mystery on their own and put pieces together that the reader might not automatically do (Resene 2016). The problem lies in the observation that Christopher demonstrates an inability to perform the necessary functions as the protagonist in a detective novel. Christopher is unable to really solve the mystery himself and requires the reader to assume the position of the superior investigator and put together the pieces that Christopher cannot (Resene 2016). By forcing readers to assume the role of a superior investigator, it has the potential to create a feeling of superiority among readers towards people on the spectrum as readers might hold Christopher as the example of a person on the spectrum and what they are and are not capable of doing. Further, by making Christopher an inferior investigator, Haddon disempowers him as a protagonist as he is not able to perform his role (Resene 2016). While Haddon's intentions might escape criticism, his choice of genre exposes him to these critiques.

³ Resene makes the argument that many protagonists in detective fiction including Sherlock Holmes can be read as being somewhere on the autism spectrum. They typically demonstrate trouble reading social cues, prefer isolation, and can separate themselves mentally from the situation to look at the big picture.

Response

Beginning with the first criticism, Haddon misrepresenting a intellectual disability, this criticism is itself problematic. First, this criticism is premised on the labelling of Christopher's disability which Haddon never does. Haddon even regrets that the publisher put the term Asperger Syndrome on the cover when it was first published (Haddon 2015). Haddon purposefully never defines or diagnoses the disability of Christopher. Instead, it is critics who have diagnosed Christopher as being autistic. It is true that Haddon does not have an intellectual disability, but he is not creating a character to be the example of what a particular disability is supposed to look like. The closest the novel comes to diagnosing Christopher is when Haddon has Christopher describe himself as having 'behavioral problems' (Haddon 2015, 2003). The behavioral problems that Christopher has are not all that out of the ordinary on their own. Christopher not liking places he does not know, not liking his food touching, or not liking certain colors on their own are problems that anybody may have regardless of whether or not they are on the autism spectrum. The criticism of misrepresentation takes these problems, diagnoses Christopher, and then argues that Christopher is not a proper representation of the diagnosis they provided.

Second, there seems to be a problem with the question, is Christopher a correct representation of a person with an intellectual disability? Only with

disability does this representational question appear because of this need to label people with disabilities going back to the medical model of disability (Haddon 2015; Schur, Blanck, and Kruse 2013). By requiring characters with disability to fit a certain label, the critics do exactly what they criticize by restricting the experience of a person with a disability into their narrowly defined concept of what that should look like. The concerns from adults with autism that Christopher may not represent them are more legitimate than the critics' concerns, but Haddon actually challenges the basic assumptions readers have about intellectual disabilities (Hacking 2010). Haddon does this by focusing on whether or not Christopher appears as a real person. By Haddon not diagnosing Christopher and having Christopher define himself as having behavioral problems, Haddon makes Christopher appear less different. Anyone could have these behavioral problems. Further, Haddon makes Christopher interesting by focusing on the mundane (Hacking 2010). Everyday life can be boring. Haddon takes the life of someone who very well could be someone with Asperger's like the critics suggest and makes his life interesting just through Christopher telling a story and talking about his everyday life instead of going into some fantastic tale. This also answers why the criticism of the romanticization of Christopher misses the mark.

To answer the second criticism, Haddon does not overly romanticize Christopher to the point that it becomes dangerous. The example of Dustin

Hoffman's character *Rain Man* is commonly used as the example of potentially problematic romanticizing of a character. Romanticization can be harmful. The common trope of the 'super cripp' can have negative consequences (Resene 2016; Talley 2005; Hacking 2010; Sandahl 2018). Stories of people with disability actually being fallen angels with secret powers,⁴ people with disabilities as being aliens, or people with disability overcoming some obstacle despite all odds being against can create harmful and unrealistic representations of people with disabilities. There is a fine line that must be walked by an author to be a positive, realistic representation of someone with a disability instead of an unrealistic caricature or other negative representation of a person with a disability. Romanticization can be positive when done strategically. Strategic romanitization uses romanticism to destigmatize disability which can be done through a savant figure for the powerful effect it has on audiences or readers who realize they may not be fully able bodied either (Talley 2005). Talley, one of the biggest critics of Haddon, argues that Haddon does not go far enough with his romanticism of Christopher to reach the point of destigmatizing disability because Christopher is unable to overcome his limitations (Talley 2005). I disagree. Christopher demonstrates his intellectual abilities through his domination of

⁴ This has happened before in a novel. A character described as autistic was supposedly a fallen angel who was being chased by other angels per Hacking 2010.

math and shows that he is able to overcome some of his problems in order to travel by himself on public transportation to his mother's house which is hard for anyone to do, especially for someone at that age and with some of Christopher's behavioral problems.

Perhaps the more challenging criticism, certainly the more unique criticism, is the choice of genre. While it is true that Christopher does have trouble completing his investigation on his own and the reader may begin to make inferences on their own, Christopher is not meant to be Sherlock Holmes. While this novel does fall into detective fiction, it is not a typical detective novel because of the elements of disability, its subtle comedy, and its accessibility (Greenwell 2004; Haddon 2015). There may be a risk that some readers do acquire that sense of superiority, but this criticism does not look at the book as a whole, but rather one element of the book which misses the mark. Additionally, Haddon does have the effect of the current trend of retroactive fiction, rereading classic stories as stories about people with an intellectual disability such as *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Sound and the Fury* (Hacking 2010). The act of rereading these classic stories can have positive effects as it can open up new meaning for and new insights into the story that may have been missed when the story is not read as a story about disability. The difference between Haddon and authors of these classic texts is that Haddon makes it clear that this story is about disability so it does not

need to be reread as a story about disability. By providing narrative power to Christopher, Haddon makes a disability important.

Just as *The Sound and the Fury*, what must be considered first and foremost is the impact that this particular narrative has on readers. This novel undoubtedly has raised readers' awareness and understanding of people with behavioral problems or people with an intellectual disability (Muller 2006; Hacking 2010; Sandahl 2018). Even if the depiction of disability may not be 100% correct, what matters is the realness of Christopher (Haddon 2015). If Christopher himself seems like a real person to the reader, that is what matters because that connects the reader to the character. Haddon intended this book to create empathy from the reader and does so by portraying a character with an intellectual disability as a very real person with real problems, not some caricature of disability (Haddon 2015). Christopher simply tells the reader a story; he walks him/her through an event that happened in his life. Haddon's novel has had a significant real world impact that indicates he did something right with his novel. Haddon's novel has been used in teacher training courses and in law enforcement training courses (Hacking 2010; Haddon 2015). Haddon cautions us that this is just a novel, not a textbook on disability, and should be treated as such (Haddon 2015). However, the widespread use of this novel to build awareness

and develop empathy in its readers signifies the overall positive impact it has had despite the shortcomings identified by its critics.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the power of narration cannot be understated. It plays a significant social role as seen throughout history and demonstrated in studies. A unique aspect of Haddon's novel is that it demonstrates the limitations to narrative storytelling (Freißmann 2008). Christopher has trouble narrating the complex mathematical and graphic cognitive functions he performs and attempts to overcome this with illustrations in the novel. In showing these limitations, however, Christopher demonstrates how he relates to the world. Christopher experiences the world in part through math and graphic cognitive functions and so this cannot simply be communicated in typical narrative form but requires extra-narrative assistance (Freißmann 2008). Further, and potentially more so than *The Sound and the Fury*, Haddon's novel highlights the importance of narration in everyday life. As Stephan Freißmann explains: "*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* demonstrates the pervasiveness of narrative as an instrument for knowing, living, and telling in everyday life, highlighting its functions *ex negative* through the first-person narrator's condition" (Freißmann 2008). Haddon's use of first person narration makes this demonstration possible.

CHAPTER FOUR

Of Mice and Men

In contrast to the previous two chapters, this chapter will analyze a novel, *Of Mice and Men*, whose author speaks about disability through a non-disabled narrator and other characters. John Steinbeck's novella, *Of Mice and Men*, takes place in 1930s California. The narrator tells the events of two characters, George and Lennie, during their time working as ranch hands. Unlike *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Steinbeck's narrator is not any of the characters in the novel. George and Lennie are two men looking for work during the Great Depression. Their story picks up as they are on their way to a new ranch after having to flee the one they previously worked at due to an incident with Lennie. Lennie, to the admission of Steinbeck, has an intellectual disability (Liptak 2018; Chaloupka 2017). It is this disability that seems to drive the novella. Lennie's disability gets him in trouble at their last job and now the narrator tells the story about George and Lennie at this new ranch. Lennie continues to get into trouble at the new ranch as well accidentally killing the ranch owner Curly's wife. After Lennie accidentally kills Curly's wife, he flees the ranch. While Curly and the other ranch hands soon find out about this and take off to kill and possibly lynch Lennie, George takes after his friend. He finds Lennie on the shore of a river, tells Lennie

about their future together, then puts a gun to the back of Lennie's head and kills him before the mob arrives.

Lennie

While some of the other author's discussed so far have not blatantly diagnosed their character(s) with disabilities, Steinbeck does. When asked about the character of Lennie, Steinbeck explained that Lennie was in fact based on a real person he had met during his time bouncing between jobs during the depression (Liptak 2018; Chaloupka 2017). Steinbeck explains that the person who 'Lennie' is based on was a ranch hand with an intellectual disability who killed his boss for firing his friend, but, because of his disability, was shown leniency and locked up in an insane asylum instead of being sent to jail or given the death penalty (Liptak 2018; Chaloupka 2017). The story of Lennie in the novel makes some notable departures from the person that Steinbeck based him on. First, the real 'Lennie' demonstrates a capacity to reason in his killing by demonstrating a clear motive, revenge for his friend (Chaloupka 2017). However, fictional Lennie's murder of Curly's wife appears completely accidental and without reason. The death is a result of Lennie not being able to control himself (Chaloupka 2017). The punishment received by each is different as well. The real 'Lennie' receives a more lenient punishment as he is allowed to live, albeit in an asylum that

probably was not very humane. Fictional Lennie, however, is mercy killed by his best friend George. These clear distinctions problematize Steinbeck's novella.

Before diving into the criticisms of Steinbeck's novella, Lennie's characteristics need to be addressed. The three major characteristics of Lennie that drive the novella and the criticism of the novella are the depictions of Lennie as an animal, Lennie as a child in a man's body, and the sexualization of Lennie. Steinbeck opens the novella providing a physical description of George and Lennie as they are making their way to the new ranch. George has very defining features; he is small and quick (Halliwell 2004). Lennie, on the otherhand, lacks these defining features and appears rather shapeless (Halliwell 2004). Notable are the comparisons made between Lennie and animals. Lennie walks heavy, dragging his feet like a bear (7). When he drinks water, he drinks like a horse. His arms swing like a pendulum. Unlike any other character in the novel, Lennie is described in his relation to animals or inanimate objects. Additionally, the mercy killing of Lennie at the end of the novel closely mirrors the mercy killing of Candy's dog. Candy is an older ranch hand who has lost a hand. He has an old dog that cannot function much anymore. The other ranch hands tell Candy it is time to put down the dog. So Candy takes the dog out back, puts his gun to

the back of the dog's head and kills him. A very similar description with the same gun is given when George kills Lennie at the end of the novel.

Further, Steinbeck makes Lennie appear childlike throughout the novel through the actions of Lennie. The implication of a childlike Lennie takes form in part by Lennie's imitation of George (Chaloupka 2017; McCabe 2014). Just from a visual standpoint, Lennie follows behind George. In the beginning of the novel, when they rest for the first night, Lennie mimics George's actions; "George lay back on the sand and crossed his hands under his head, and Lennie imitated him, raising his head to see if he were doing it right... he pulled his hat down a little more over his eyes the way George's hat was" (7). Lennie looks for verification of his imitation from George the same way children look for verification when they pretend to be their parent (Chaloupka 2017). This description of Lennie's actions, taken in a vacuum, could just as easily be a son trying to be like his dad. Additionally, sometimes when George gets mad at Lennie, Lennie's response is to threaten to runaway (Halliwell 2004). The image here is one of a child being disciplined by their guardian, getting upset, then threatening to run away without really thinking that through. George always points out to Lennie how running away to live in a cave would not work for Lennie, practically showing Lennie has not really thought through the threat. George also responds by telling Lennie this story about their future life where they have their own farm, are their

own bosses, and, for Lennie, have rabbits (Halliwell 2004). At the end of the novel, when George mercy kills Lennie, this is the story he tells Lennie right before he shoots Lennie. This story appears like a bed time story and seems to serve as such for Lennie, once again making him appear childlike. Further, Lennie's blind obedience to George despite also being an adult, reinforces George as a father/guardian over Lennie (McCabe 2014). All of this imagery combined with the fact that George serves as a de facto guardian of Lennie pushes the narrative designation of Lennie as a grown up child.

Lennie's sexualization in this novel stems from his obsession with the sense of touch and feeling. The reader sees from the very beginning that the sense of touch and how things feels is important to Lennie. In the beginning, Lennie is walking around with a dead mouse in his pocket because he likes the way the fur feels (3). George implies to the reader this is not the first time Lennie has done this either. He knows right away Lennie has something and this whole interaction makes it seem like Lennie has gone through it many times already. Additionally, George and Lennie had to flee their previous job because Lennie grabbed onto a woman's dress because he liked the feel of the fabric. The woman freaked out which then freaked out Lennie who did not let go of the dress. Throughout the novel, touch remains a critical part of Lennie's character. Lennie gets a puppy and spends all his free time petting and playing with the puppy. Then at the end of the novel, Curly's wife

prompts Lennie to feel her hair. Lennie does this and seems to enjoy it.

However, eventually she wants him to stop and proceeds to yell at him. This cause Lennie to once again freak out, except this time Lennie kills Curly's wife. The obsession with touch throughout the novel reinforces the idea of Lennie being hypersexual (Halliwell 2004; McCabe 2014). While Steinbeck is not explicit about this point, the first incident with the woman from the last ranch and now Curly's wife suggests to the reader some sort of uncontrollable sexuality of Lennie.

Criticisms

Out of the four novels discussed in this thesis, *Of Mice and Men* is perhaps the most problematic, but also potentially the one most engrained into American culture. This novel is taught in classrooms throughout America. This novel has become so engrained into American culture Lennie was used in a Texas death penalty case as a point of reference (Liptak 2018; Loftis 2015b). The criminal court of appeals in Texas included the following in their ruling:

We, however, must define that level and degree of mental retardation at which a consensus of Texas citizens would agree that a person should be exempted from the death penalty. Most Texas citizens might agree that Steinbeck's Lennie should, by virtue of his lack of reasoning ability and adaptive skills, be

exempt. But, does a consensus of Texas citizens agree that all persons who might legitimately qualify for assistance under the social services definition of mental retardation be exempt from an otherwise constitutional penalty? (Ex parte Jose Garcie BRISENO 2004).

Almost 70 years after publication of the novella, it is being used in a court case to create a standard for when the state can execute someone with an intellectual disability. In effect, the court is saying that anyone who is less impaired than the fictional Lennie can be put to death by the state (Liptak 2018; Loftis 2015b; Hicks 2012). These factors stood for over a decade until the Supreme Court of the United States overturned them in a 5-3 decision. The 3 dissenting justices, Chief Justice Roberts, Justice Alito, and Justice Thomas, went so far as to even write a dissenting opinion. This law stood on the books for over a decade until the Supreme Court struck down using a fictional character to decide who gets to have constitutional rights (Hicks 2012). Whether Steinbeck intended to or not, he created a character that has been engrained into the American consciousness. Lennie has become an archetype of stereotypically slow characters on TV shows for decades (Hicks 2012). Just from a practical, pragmatic standpoint, Steinbeck's novel has contributed to discriminatory practices towards and portrayals of people with intellectual disabilities for almost a century.

The narrative of disability in the novel itself is problematic as well. Starting with the test of Mitchell and Snyder, Steinbeck's novella fails to

employ disability as anything but a narrative prosthesis (D. T. Mitchell and Snyder 2001). Steinbeck's Lennie only matters in his relation to other characters in the novella. Steinbeck uses Lennie to test the intentions and morality of the other characters (Halliwell 2004). Steinbeck could have told the story of the ranch hand who Lennie is supposedly based on. Steinbeck could have extended the power of narration to Lennie following the example of Faulkner. Instead, Steinbeck departs from his real experience and reduces Lennie to the lowest common denominator (Chaloupka 2017; Halliwell 2004). Steinbeck dehumanizes Lennie, portraying him as an animal, a hollow self not in control of his own body. Even in the death of Curly's wife, Lennie is stripped of the ability to even kill for reason. By removing the ability to reason and create a motive like the real ranch hand Lennie is based on, Steinbeck makes Lennie just a violent, sexually aggressive 'idiot'⁵ who must be put down (Chaloupka 2017). The concept of rationality is central to discussions of intellectual disability. From Plato to Kant, philosophers have distinguished human from animal based on the idea that humans can reason, can create rational thought (Jensen-Moulton 2012). If Lennie does not have the power to reason, then from the long standing philosophical tradition Lennie would not be human. Lennie is reduced to animal, just as he is

⁵ I recognize 'idiot' is a very negative and derogatory term in the field of disability. It is being used here to represent the language of people like Steinbeck and others of the time. A discussion of the culture of disability at that time will follow.

described in *Of Mice and Men*, which then justifies the violence against him, the mercy killing of him (Jensen-Moulton 2012). Just as one puts down a dog who can no longer walk or may have some sort of disability or perceived suffering, so to must one put down the violent ‘idiot.’

The discriminatory culture of disability during the 1930’s pervades *Of Mice and Men*. During this time, eugenics was on the rise. In California alone, where Steinbeck lived, 21,000 people were sterilized as they attempted to eliminate the ‘feeble-minded’ from society (Jensen-Moulton 2012). The institutionalization of people with disabilities was also becoming popular at the time. They were viewed as an abnormality that needed to be controlled for. In *Of Mice and Men*, Steinbeck reflects this movement and the negative conditions and stigma of these institutions as he continues to try to keep Lennie out of the ‘loony bin’ and ends up deciding to kill him in the end (Jensen-Moulton 2012). However, whether intentional or not, Steinbeck’s portrayal of Lennie supports the institutionalization of people with intellectual disabilities. Lennie is someone with an intellectual disability who has avoided institutionalization so far but has gotten into trouble seemingly because of his disability thus demonstrating the supposed need for institutionalization because as long as people like Lennie are free, they will continue to pose a danger to society (Jensen-Moulton 2012). The necessary consequence of this line of thinking is the segregation of people with

disabilities from society. Steinbeck contributes to the history of Americans with disabilities as harmful and dangerous to society and this history has manifested itself in reality such as the Texas' legal system (Jensen-Moulton 2012). The harmful cultural ideas of the time find themselves readily apparent in Steinbeck's novella.

The legacy of that time period produced a particularly harmful trope that has lasted through the decades: the kill or cure trope of disability. Following from the cultural logic of eugenics during that time, disability was something that either had to be cured or killed (Jensen-Moulton 2012; Chaloupka 2017; Loftis 2015b). This logic exists through the medical model of disability previously discussed. With the advances in science and medicine, some cure had to be found for disability. To proponents of this model and logic, there is something so inherently bad and evil about disability that it must be eliminated from society. Continuously throughout the novel, George can be seen trying to cure Lennie (Loftis 2015b; Chaloupka 2017). George tries to control Lennie. If Lennie will just listen to him, he thinks, then everything will be fine; Lennie will not get into trouble and his disability won't be a problem for George. When they first arrive to the ranch, George does everything he can to cover up Lennie's disability, even saying Lennie was kicked by a horse because becoming disabled from an accident is apparently better than being born with a disability (Chaloupka 2017; Loftis

2015b). If that is the case, then eugenics and euthanasia make sense. If it is so bad to have a genetic disability, then society should try to eliminate that disability. However, this thinking ignores the basic humanity inherent in everyone.

Response

Steinbeck's novella does not have many redeeming qualities about it when it comes to disability. One could make the argument that the novel at least exposes the reader to disability which could be a positive. A reader could have a negative reaction towards the treatment of Lennie and others with disabilities in the novel and develop some sympathy towards people with disabilities. One could make the argument that Steinbeck is a product of his time and should not be judged for reflecting that in a novella. However, Steinbeck did have examples of first person narrations of disability from Faulkner that he could have drawn from. While Faulkner takes a step forward in many regards, Steinbeck takes disability a step back. Regardless, the impact of this novel cannot be understated. It has manifested itself in law. With the widespread teaching of this novella, it is likely that policy makers read this novella at some point in their education (McCabe 2014). If there is any hope for *Of Mice and Men*, it lies in the teaching of it. Teachers

could use this novella to demonstrate the negative attitudes towards disability (McCabe 2014). They could use this as an example of what not to do and by exposing the discrimination of people based on ability could potentially raise some awareness or develop some empathy.

CHAPTER FIVE

To Kill a Mockingbird

Similar to the previous chapter, this chapter examines another novel with a non-disabled narrator speaking about other characters with disabilities. Harper Lee's famous *To Kill a Mockingbird* takes place in Maycomb, Alabama in the 1930s. The novel centers on the Finch family. Atticus Finch is the now single father of Jem and Scout Finch. Scout Finch is the narrator of the novel and she tells two narratives simultaneously. First, there is the narrative of Tom Robinson. Tom Robinson is an African-American man wrongly accused of raping a white woman. Atticus Finch agrees to take Tom's case. Atticus does his best to defend Tom in trial, but ultimately the racial prejudice of the town wins and Tom is sent to jail. The metanarrative is about Arthur 'Boo' Radley (Gilmore 2010). Three children, Jem, Scout, and Dill, a kid new to Maycomb, very quickly develop a fascination with Arthur. The metanarrative of Arthur tells the story of someone cast out from conservative Maycomb society for his disability.

To Kill a Mockingbird is often spoken of in terms of its racial context leaving disability overlooked or pushed to the side. However, disability plays a very important role in the novel nonetheless (Loftis 2015a; D. T. Mitchell and Snyder 2001). This book contains four different characters with

disabilities: Arthur 'Boo' Radley, Jem Finch, Mrs. Dubose, and Tom Robinson. In fact, Harper Lee begins the book indicating it is the story of how Jem broke his arm. With each of these characters, disability plays an important role in who they are. Mrs. Dubose is confined to a wheelchair and requires morphine to function on a daily basis. Jem and Tom Robinson both have injuries to their left arm. Jem injures his arm towards the end of the novel following the attack by Bob Ewell, the same man accusing Tom Robinson of rape. Tom Robinson has a left arm that is shorter than his right and shriveled preventing its use, which turns out to play an important role in Atticus Finch's defense of Tom. While Arthur 'Boo' Radley will be the focus of this chapter, it is worth examining Tom Robinson's disability, the connection to Jem, and contrast to Bob Ewell.

Tom Robinson and Jem both at some point suffer a disabling injury to their left arm resulting in a stronger, longer, and more functional right arm. Bob Ewell, on the other hand, is left-handed. When Atticus is defending Tom, he calls attention to the bruises on Ms. Ewell to show it must have been someone left-handed and not someone whose left hand is not functional. The left versus right-handedness carries some potentially important implications. The left hand has always been considered unclean and evil in society. The Latin word for the left hand is *sinistra* which has since become a word for evil. The right, however, is moral and just (Loftis 2015a). In the novel,

Atticus is said to “always shoot a little to the right” (Lee 60). While it is possible that Harper Lee did not mean for such a reading and this is merely a convenient plot tool used by Lee, the symbolism of right and left can be seen in the novel.

Arthur ‘Boo’ Radley

Arthur ‘Boo’ Radley presents a different type of character not seen in the previous two novels discussed. Arthur Radley most likely is on the spectrum given the descriptions of him and his actions throughout the novel (Loftis 2015a). The three aspects of his character most notable are the animalistic descriptions of Arthur, his ghostliness, and the freak show-esque interest he draws from others. Before getting into those, it is important to understand Arthur’s disability and why he is placed on the autism spectrum. There are very few interactions with Arthur himself making it difficult to get a picture of who he is, but not impossible. Arthur comes out towards the very end of the novel and most of the real descriptions of him, not just the dehumanizing rumors, come from this scene. Arthur displays several traits that together lead scholars to place him on the spectrum. First, Arthur does not communicate very much and tends to be very quiet the few times he does talk (Loftis 2015a). His communication for the most part is limited to him

leaving gifts for Scout and Jem in the tree. Towards the end of the novel when Arthur is at the Finch's, Arthur is described as speaking as if he is whispering. Additionally, most of Arthur's communication during the end of the novel is nonverbal. Second, Arthur's moves in an odd, almost uncomfortable manner (Loftis 2015a). Arthur's gait is described as being odd, his steps uneasy, and his movements uncertain. In the same vein, Arthur does not sit down when at the Finch's, but continues to stand aside in the corner until directed by Scout to come and see Jem. Third, Arthur displays a trouble expressing emotions in 'normal' ways and social disengagement (Loftis 2015a). After Arthur gets in trouble with the police for spending time with the wrong crowd, Arthur's father, Mr. Radley, convinces the police to let Arthur stay isolated at home. Now, this isolation and Mr. Radley's seemingly abusive treatment of Arthur could have caused some post-traumatic stress disorder in Arthur and be the explanatory factor for the lack of emotional skills and social disengagement of Arthur, but it is more likely that disability underlies the character of Arthur and explains his character and behavior with any childhood environment being more of a contributory factor (Loftis 2015a; Miller 2010). Regardless, Arthur stays isolated in his house. He has an incident where he stabs his father with a scissors when Arthur is interrupted scrapbooking. Throughout the rest of the novel, Arthur remains

isolated in his house living as a recluse until he is brought out by Bob Ewell's attack on Jem and Scout.

Very early in the novel, Harper Lee provides readers with the community's animalistic depiction of Arthur 'Boo' Radley. In the first chapter, Jem describes what he knows from others about Arthur to Jem and Scout's new friend, Dill, who is not from Maycomb. The first notable image Jem provides of Arthur portrays Arthur as a wild animal: "I've seen his tracks in our backyard many a mornin', and one night I heard him scratching on the back screen, but he was gone time Atticus got there" (12). If this quote were taken out of context and examined in a vacuum, it could just as easily be describing an animal and readers would probably think it is describing an animal. Animals have tracks. People have footsteps or foot prints. Jem even guesses Arthur's height based off his tracks (13). This reads eerily similar to a hunter tracking an animal. Further, animals scratch at screens, not humans. The sentence sounds like they are dealing with some wild animal nuisance, not a human being. Conveniently for Jem's picture of Arthur, whatever was scratching at the door left before Atticus got there. Jem continues his description of Arthur adding that "he dines on raw squirrels and any cats he could catch" (13). While this sentence may just seem more disturbing than animalistic, given the previous description of Arthur by Jem it furthers the image that Arthur is this dangerous wild animal that goes

around at night scratching at people's doors and preying on other wild animals. While Jem is providing this description to Scout and Dill, he is doing so without having ever actually seen Arthur just like most townspeople in Maycomb.

More troubling than the animalistic description of Arthur may be the depiction of Arthur as some ghostly monster. The very first mention of the Radley house, at which Arthur lives, is that it is inhabited by an unknown entity (6). The Radley residence is viewed as if it is some haunted house and Arthur is the spirit that haunts it. Scout, the narrator, provides the mythic view of the Radley residence early in Chapter One:

Inside the house lived a malevolent phantom. People said he existed, but Jem and I had never seen him. People said he went out at night when the moon was down, and peeped in windows. When people's azaleas froze in a cold snap, it was because he had breathed on them. Any stealthy crimes committed in Maycomb were his work. Once the town was terrorized by a series of morbid nocturnal events... although the culprit was Crazy Addie... people still looked at the Radley Place, unwilling to discard their initial suspicions (8-9).

Before Arthur is even given a name in the novel, he is painted to be some horrifying, dangerous spirit upon which all of Maycomb's problems were blamed even when the real culprit was exposed. After Arthur's history is described, the narrator describes Arthur coming home: "from the day Mr. Radley took Arthur home, people said the house died" (11). Just having someone who they do not understand at home is enough for the house to die.

The mythos of Arthur from being an animal to some phantom fascinates Jem, Scout, and Dill, the three main children of the novel like Arthur were in a 'freak' show. Much of the novel is driven by the children's fascination with the unknown Arthur. Dill is immediately overwhelmed by curiosity. "Wonder what he does in there... wonder what he looks like" asks Dill (12). His curiosity drives the metanarrative forward as his curiosity leads to him daring Jem to go touch the Radley house. It becomes his goal to get Arthur to come out. He wants to see this mysterious being for his own eyes. The fascination with Arthur spreads to Jem and Scout and they join Dill in trying to bring out or interact with Arthur somehow. It starts with this game of chicken that the kids play with touching the Radley house, then it builds with the mysterious gifts left to the kids, then it escalates to the children play-acting Arthur (Gilmore 2010). This fascination with the other appears reminiscent of the 'freak' shows that used to occur where people who looked different were put on display to satiate the desire of those fascinated with the other (Loftis 2015a). In a similar way, Scout's and Jem's fascination with Arthur is not satiated until they see him at the end.

Criticisms

Harper Lee has received much praise and recognition for what she does in the novel. Because of the fame and recognition of this novel, it is widely taught in primary school. In terms of disability, Lee puts the ugliness of discrimination on display to seemingly encourage tolerance and empathy in the reader. The way she does that may not be the most productive method. Using a white, able-bodied narrator growing up around racism and ableism may not provide the best perspective and truly inspire that tolerance and acceptance that Lee is seeking. The insertion of disability into the narrative creates potential problems as it appears to be a narrative prosthesis. The combination of the narrative prosthesis and third-person narration of disability have some problematic implications.

First and foremost, Lee's depiction of disability in *To Kill a Mockingbird* fosters negative stereotypes of disability. Lee does this in a couple of ways. Lee only offers a simplistic and dehumanizing exploration of disability in her novel (Loftis 2015a). Even if Jem and Scout learn to appreciate the perspective of Arthur, Arthur is still described in a dehumanizing manner throughout the novel. Arthur is wild animal, a malevolent phantom, and someone from a 'freak' show. While some of the negative aspects of Arthur's character may be overcome by the end of the novel, Arthur still lives in isolation in his house. Additionally, Arthur is

depicted as the nonexistent other (Gilmore 2010). Arthur plays an unusual role in which his name exists, there is someone in Maycomb named Arthur Radley, but no one really knows who Arthur is because Lee tells us very little about Arthur (Gilmore 2010). Moreover, Arthur is never seen by the community. In this way, Arthur poses a paradox to the reader. To the children, Arthur commands their attention with his mythos, but to the rest of Maycomb, he is largely forgotten (McElaney 2010). Through the forgetting of Arthur, the town stigmatizes Arthur as non-being. The classic tropes of disability emerge through the depiction of Arthur. The character with a disability is once again invisible to one group, fascinating to another, and terrifying to almost all (McElaney 2010). However admirable Harper Lee's notions may have been in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, the negative depiction of disability throughout the novel represent the problematic nature of Harper Lee's narrative.

In addition to the depiction of Arthur's disability in the novel, disability appears to function as a narrative prosthesis in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Similar to *The Sound and the Fury*, Harper Lee uses disability to show the moral failings of Maycomb (D. T. Mitchell and Snyder 2001; Bérubé 2005). As discussed previously under the Faulkner chapter, narrative prosthesis is problematic because the author only uses disability for their own selfish, opportunistic purposes to show the moral failings of society. In

this case, Lee is using disability to criticize the Maycomb community while she pushes her message of tolerance and acceptance (D. T. Mitchell and Snyder 2001). The difference between *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *The Sound and the Fury* lies in the narrative view taken. Faulkner employs first person narration and provides agency and narrative powers to his character, Benjy Compson, who has a disability. Even if Faulkner does employ narrative prosthesis, he does utilize other positive narrative practices. Lee, on the contrary, employs first person narration and never truly provides the viewpoint of her character with a disability, Arthur Radley.

Harper Lee brings the reader face to face with disability but fails to take them past the threshold to understanding (D. T. Mitchell and Snyder 2001). Nothing here is more symbolic than Scout walking Arthur back to his house. When Scout walks Arthur back, she stops at his porch as he walks in. Then Scout turns around and remarks, "Atticus was right. One time he said you never really know a man until you stand in his shoes and walk around in them. Just standing on the Radley porch was enough" (296). Scout thinks she understands the perspective of Arthur based on one interaction with him in which she walks him home, but never enters his home; never enters his world. However, as was the criticism of Faulkner's Benjy and Haddon's Christopher Boone, Lee embraces a simplistic display of disability in her novel (Talley 2005; D. T. Mitchell and Snyder 2001). What enables Faulkner

and Haddon to overcome or at least minimize this particular criticism is that they empower their character with a disability by giving him the power of narration. In this novel, not only does Arthur have a paradoxical nonexistence, but Arthur is not provided any perspective. The only image of disability that readers have is the image described by Scout which is the negative depictions previously discussed.

Lee's novel provides an interesting intersection between disability and race in her novel. While other novels discussed in this thesis also have some relation to race,⁶ Lee has the most prominent intersection of race and disability as seen through the two main minority characters of Arthur and Tom, both with disabilities, the latter also being African-American. In this novel, both race and disability are spoken of in similar terms (McElaney 2010). Degrading pity is disguised as empathy. The upstanding, moral character in the novel, Atticus Finch, is guilty of this as he remarks that it is worse to cheat a black man than it is a white man (McElaney 2010). Any damage done to an African-American or to someone with a disability somehow becomes magnified because they are viewed as already damaged. Tom Robinson represents the critical juncture of race and disability as he

⁶ *The Sound and the Fury* takes place around a similar time and setting in which racism is present, but distinct from disability. *Of Mice and Men* takes place at a similar time as well and features racist undertones. *Of Mice and Men* comes closest to *To Kill a Mockingbird* in the intersection of race and disability as both novels feature an African-American with a disability.

stands trial for a crime he did not commit (Miller 2010). Similar to how Arthur becomes a center of fascination for the kids, Tom Robinson becomes the center of fascination for the town.

While Arthur certainly is not on public display like Tom is, Tom also has the more noticeable disability, a shriveled left arm. Tom's disability is so noticeable or at least so prominent that Scout introduces the chapter of Tom's testimony by speaking of Tom's difficulty moving his left arm: "Thomas Robinson reached around, ran his fingers under his left arm and lifted it. He guided his arm to the Bible and his rubber-like left hand sought contact with the black binding. As he raised his right hand, the useless one slipped off the Bible and hit the clerk's table" (199). In this moment, Tom's disability invites a politics of staring (Miller 2010). People throughout the courthouse from Scout and the audience to the judge stare at Tom as he takes the stand and struggles with taking the oath. Staring contains social power as the spectator marks bodies as disabled or able-bodied spectacles and is often a way for the spectator to confirm their own able-bodiedness (Miller 2010). Through the narrator Scout, Harper Lee places Tom under the gaze of the audience and thus the reader. The spectacle under the gaze of the audience or spectator may lose control of the audience over their voice and over their body which can be seen in Tom (Miller 2010). Similar to Tom, Lee places Arthur under the gaze of the audience, just on a smaller level. At the end of the novel as

Scout stands on her own porch, Scout puts Arthur, another character with a disability, under her stare once she finally sees him. When Scout sees Arthur, not only does she stare at this mysterious figure just as her and the other kids stared at the Radley house, but she sees everything that is missing (Miller 2010). Arthur's cheeks are thin to hollowness, his gray eyes were so light in color Scout thought he was blind, and his hair was dead and thin. To Scout, Arthur still appears very different from what should seemingly be a healthy, 'normal' person.

Further, Scout's description of Arthur in the final chapters of the novel pair with Dr. Reynolds greeting point towards the medicalization of disability. Dr. Reynolds greets Arthur as if he they interact regularly: "Dr. Reynold's voice was as breezy as his step, as though he had said it every evening of his life, an announcement that astounded me even more than being in the same room as Boo Radley" (286). Dr. Reynolds familiarity with Arthur narratively places disability into the medical model that was prominent at the time (Miller 2010). Scout adds on to the medicalization of disability through her own view of Arthur via her description of his appearance as sickly (286). As discussed previously in this thesis, the medical model of disability is a very problematic model of disability because it locates disability within the individual and views it as a problem in need of a cure (Schur, Blanck, and Kruse 2013). Lee passes this model onto the reader as

she employs through the Scout's narrative of Arthur. Lee then goes one step further and combines the medical model of disability with the politics of staring resulting in Arthur being scrutinized under the medical gaze (Miller 2010). Lee sets this up through the imagery she uses when Scout first sees Arthur. Scout points to Arthur in the corner of the room and, similar to Tom, seems to lose control over himself to Scout. When Scout points, Arthur immediately goes from having his arms crossed to throwing both arms against the wall to leaving sweaty streaks on the wall as he moves his hands from the wall to his belt (285). Being under the gaze of Scout clearly has an effect on him that he seemingly cannot control.

Response

Despite these problems, Lee has still received much praise for the work she has done in her novel. Harper Lee puts the ugliness of discrimination on display. Lee tries to inspire empathy towards Tom and Arthur by making them likeable characters. The unlikeable characters are those who actively display discriminatory, racist attitudes such as Bob Ewell. Lee even includes the message of tolerance and acceptance by arguing through Scout that you need to walk around in someone else's shoes for a day to understand them. Lee's attempts at criticizing racism and ableism through her novel is

admirable. By the end of the novel Jem and Scout do appear to appreciate the perspective of the other (Loftis 2015a). However, Lee's attempts come up short rendering the novel rather counterproductive by failing to overcome the criticisms mentioned. Even if Lee uses her powers as the author to say Scout and Jem have gained a new understanding of the other, that understanding does not pass on to the reader due to the image of disability present throughout the novel and due to the source of understanding that Lee claims.

The question of Lee's target audience must be explored here. Is Harper Lee writing to America as a whole or is she writing to white America? It appears as though she is writing to white America. The novel implies that the other needs the pity and rescuing of a white, able-bodied hero such as Atticus Finch (Loftis 2015a). Lee does this in two ways. First, she fails to include the perspective of the other, and second, the other consistently is the character in need who cannot help themselves, but rather needs saving (Loftis 2015a). When it comes to the issue of race in the novel, it could be that Lee is just trying to keep the novel realistic to its setting. African-Americans would not have been offered a voice by the white community while segregation was still going strong. Additionally, Tom Robinson is not a lawyer and would still need legal representation so Atticus coming to his rescue here makes sense. However, the same cannot be said when it comes to disability. Each of the characters with disabilities in the novel at some point requires the aid of an

able-bodied character. Mrs. Dubose receives that aid from Jem. This help is more defensible as Mrs. Dubose is in a wheel chair so gardening would not be very easy for her in her old age. However, the character of Arthur is once again unique. The reader gets a glimpse of Arthur being the hero. Arthur saves Jem and Scout from Bob Ewell who is trying to kill them. Arthur's position as the hero quickly fades as once again Atticus Finch and, this time, Sheriff Tate step in to become the heroes. Atticus, ever loyal to the law, wants to go through the legal process and explain to the community what happened. Sheriff Tate convinces him that is not the right course of action. They cannot put Arthur on trial to show him as a hero because white people and black people alike will punish disability (D. T. Mitchell and Snyder 2001). Lee immediately strips Arthur of the ability to take care of himself and places him once again in the need of someone like Atticus Finch and Sheriff Tate to decide what is best for him.

By treating the outsiders in the novel as people in need of pity and rescuing by some able-bodied white man like Atticus Finch, Lee strips the outsiders of any agency they might have and effectively silences them. Tom comes closest to receiving a voice in the novel by actually being able to speak as he takes the stand during his trial, but Arthur is never given the opportunity to have a voice (D. T. Mitchell and Snyder 2001; Loftis 2015a; Miller 2010). In fact, the only time Arthur even talks, he is described as

childlike by Scout further stigmatizing him and his disability (295). Arthur, like the other outsiders, or Mockingbirds as Lee might say, never have agency in the novel. They do not have power over their own destiny and for some, they have no power over their story. Lee has the chance to elevate Arthur at the end of the novel when he becomes a hero, but instead, she places him in the medical model of disability, describes him as a child, and, through Scout, escorts Arthur back to the institution, his house, where he will return to his position as some mysterious monster (Miller 2010). While Lee wants to achieve that agenda of tolerance and acceptance, none of the outsiders of Maycomb county like Arthur, Tom, or Mrs. Dubose are ever included in society (Loftis 2015a). Lee's ambitions may be very noble, but to ignore the glaring textual problems of the Scout's narration throughout the novel would be a mistake. Narratives come with an obligation to listen; as human beings, we have an ethical responsibility to listen to the stories of the other because humans are storied beings (Waxler 2014; Miller 2010). Denying Arthur his story rejects his humanity just as his humanity is rejected by those in Maycomb County.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

This thesis began by asking the question, what are the best narrative practices when creating a narrative about disability? With the rather recent development of disability studies and the continued evolution of disability narratives over the last century, many different methods have been experimented with and their effects observed. What has been missing has been a comparative analysis of these practices in order to develop some form of best practices. This thesis has sought to answer that question. Through an analysis of the four novels, *The Sound and the Fury* by William Faulkner, *The Curious Incident of the Dog at Night-Time* by Mark Haddon, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, and *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, three goals emerge for telling a narrative: it should build empathy, it should provide as realistic a picture of disability as possible, and it should avoid the negative tropes of disability. The best way to do achieve these goals is through the use of first person narration of disability.

From Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, we get our first glimpse at the potential of first person narration of disability through the character of Benjy. By giving the power of narration to Benjy, Faulkner provides Benjy

with a sense of agency. He can tell his own story instead of being silenced and having his story told for him by someone who does not understand. The reader sees the world through Benjy's eyes; how he makes memories, how he interacts with the world, and so on. Benjy presents the reader with the opportunity to empathize with him because they now have some shared experience through the process of storytelling and listening. However, Faulkner's overall narrative of disability falls short of achieving the goals discussed above. Faulkner himself speaks very negatively about disability calling into question his intentions with the use of Benjy. It appears as though he uses him as a narrative prosthesis (D. T. Mitchell and Snyder 2001). Instead of letting a character with a disability simply be a character with a disability, the character of Benjy is used as a moral barometer for which society is to be judged. Further, the depiction of intellectual disability through Benjy may not be the most accurate depiction of disability which could also be due to the lack of knowledge about intellectual disabilities at the time. Benjy's character is dehumanized to the status of animal throughout other character's speaking of Benjy. The possible criticisms of this novel seem to gain traction due to the negative comments about Benjy provided by Faulkner. Nevertheless, Faulkner's provision of narrative power to Benjy is admirable and provides a baseline for best practices.

John Steinbeck takes a major step back in the field of disability in his novel *Of Mice and Men*. John Steinbeck abandons the first person narrative stance for a third person narration of disability. While there are ways to make a third person narrative more productive such as Harper Lee does in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but Steinbeck does not. Instead, Steinbeck embraces the culture of eugenics that dominated his time. He presents a character, Lennie, with an intellectual disability as an animal. What makes Steinbeck markedly different from Faulkner is the element of mercy killing. Steinbeck attempts to justify the mercy killing of someone with a disability by comparing killing a dog to 'put it out of it's misery' to killing Lennie. Legitimizes violence against the disabled body and conveys that life with a disability is not worth living. Similar to Faulkner, Steinbeck does not appear to have the best intentions when it came to writing Lennie. By distorting the story of the ranch hand that Lennie's character is based on, Steinbeck further dehumanizes Lennie by making him appear totally incapable of reason and controlling his own body. He continues the negative stereotype of people with intellectual disabilities as sexually aggressive 'idiots.' Steinbeck's novel has been so engrained in American culture that Texas used Lennie as the standard for intellectual disability in deciding the death sentence. There is not really any redeeming quality about this novel other than potentially a

reader seeing this book as so negative that it causes readers to look more into the issue of disability.

Harper Lee continues on with the third person narration of disability but makes some progress following the setback by Steinbeck. Harper Lee does appear to have very admirable intentions as she tries to develop empathy for the African-American community and people with disabilities. She makes an effort at the end to actually portray the character with a disability in a positive light and develop some understanding of the person with the disability. However, Harper Lee fails to avoid many of the pitfalls of her predecessors. She still displays the character with an intellectual disability, Arthur 'Boo' Radley, in a negative, dehumanizing light. He is some malevolent phantom for which all the evil deeds in Maycomb are blamed. He is described as a ghastly monster. Arthur still potentially exists as a narrative prosthesis. Harper Lee wants the reader to pass judgment on this society and does so by creating characters with disabilities to play the victims of prejudice and discrimination. Harper Lee's greatest failure is symbolized by the image of Scout stopping on the front porch. Harper Lee walks up to that threshold in the novel. She gets close to developing empathy and an understanding of her character with a disability. However, the key ingredient that she is missing in her narrative is the first person perspective. Arthur is never given a voice, but Harper Lee writes this off. Scout still somehow

knows Arthur's story from a short walk home. The disabled character is never given a voice. His experience, his story, is never given a voice. He is instead sent home back into his house, never to be seen again, permanently excluded from participating in society. Arthur never fully overcomes the negative, monstrous depiction from the start of the novel and never has full agency. Even when he becomes the hero, it quickly becomes Atticus who is the hero. The white, able-bodied characters have to take care of Arthur because he is incapable of taking care of himself. Lee demonstrates the need to include the first person narration to really achieve those goals of empathy development, understanding, and realistic depiction of disability.

Finally, Mark Haddon puts the together the pieces to craft a highly productive disability narrative in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Haddon creates the character Christopher Boone who tells his story. He does not fall into any of the typical tropes of disability. He is not suddenly a super hero because of his disability (the 'super cripp' trope), he is not some poor victim, nor is he a villain because of his disability. Instead, he is just a boy who loves math, Sherlock Holmes, and the color red among other things. Christopher may think differently than others as seen in the book, but he has real human interests. The reader goes on a journey with Christopher getting a glimpse into his world, how he thinks, and how he sees and acts in the world. By giving Christopher the power of narration, Haddon

empowers Christopher. He lets him participate in the world by giving him a voice and letting him tell his story instead of someone telling it for him. It enables the reader to better understand his experience and begin to develop empathy. What makes Haddon different from Faulkner is that he avoids the negative depictions about someone with a disability. He lets the character have a disability just for the sake of it, rather than some other narrative purpose. While his portrayal of disability may not perfectly represent intellectual disability as he himself does not have an intellectual disability, he does not provide an absurd or particularly harmful depiction of intellectual disability. More importantly, he makes Christopher and his story real and relatable. Haddon pushes back against the negative stereotypes of intellectual disability through his comedic and accessible novel. The positive impact of Haddon's novel can be seen in all the real world impacts it has had by serving as a resource for numerous groups from teachers to police men and women.

All of this is profoundly important. As Waxler points out, telling stories, narration is part of the human experience (Waxler 2014). Story telling has been around since the beginning of time. It is how we connect to each other. Studies show that narratives play an important role in social interactions, particularly in remembering social setting and understanding social events (Freißmann 2008). However, we have not and do not always

include everyone into this act, into this part of the human experience. People with all kinds of disabilities have been silenced throughout history. They have been marginalized, cast aside, and forgotten along with their story. They have been spoken of, spoken for, but rarely spoken through. Disability studies is finally addressing this critical issue, but the field is still new. Much work still needs to be done. This thesis offers an argument for a best practice when it comes to constructing a narrative of disability in literature based on its appearance in the four novels discussed. By speaking through the character with the disability, they can be given the power, the agency to speak for themselves. They can share their story and connect it to the broader human narrative. First person narrations best equip the reader to empathize with people with disabilities and begin to understand their perspective. This thesis is not dispositive nor exhaustive. Future research should continue to develop best practices. Maybe there are genres that are better suited than others to achieve the aforementioned goals. Future research could examine numerous other novels that were not covered in this thesis. This thesis hopefully can serve as a springboard for future scholars to delve further into this topic.

I began this thesis, in part, to learn how to tell my own story of disability, so here is that story.

All my life, I have dealt with disability in a variety of forms. My first experience with disability took the form of speech impediments. I had a difficult time speaking clearly as a child. When I talked, people could not understand me. I did not know what I was doing wrong. I knew what I wanted to say but it would not come out right. It was frustrating and embarrassing. I did not like constantly repeating myself only to give up. I felt embarrassed. Why could not I talk like everyone else? Why do I always have to repeat myself? I became discouraged so I stopped talking. I became extremely introverted because it was easier to just stay quiet than risk talking and it not going well. I did not talk to people I did not know. Even with people I did know, I did not talk much. Talking was terrifying. So a couple times a week I had to attend speech therapy. I had to learn how to and condition myself to move my mouth to become more understandable, to make the proper sounds. I attended speech therapy through fifth grade. In learning to talk, I found a love for spelling. My first steps to speaking in front of other people or to people outside of my immediate family was in spelling bees. My dream was to win the Scripps National Spelling Bee. While that dream never happened, this dream helped me work through my speech therapy.

After graduating from speech therapy, my experience with disability took a new route, physical disability. I was born pigeon-toed. This just means that my feet were rotated inward. This is not that uncommon nor is it really

all that severe. Most people do not experience any problems. Some people outgrow it. People are even able to overcome it simply with some corrective braces. This was not the case for me. It turns out my rotation was significant. I saw a doctor when I was very young for leg pain but was told it was just growing pains and that I should take ibuprofen. So that is what I did. I continued on what most would consider a pretty normal life for a kid my age. I played baseball in our local little league. I played soccer for a few years. But baseball was my life. Even though I may have still been in elementary school, I ate, slept, and dreamt of baseball. My dream was to play for the Milwaukee Brewers, to hear my name announced over the PA system at Miller Park. I went to the last game at County Stadium and the first game at Miller Park. I listened to every game on the radio. I even wrote a letter to Bob Uecker (and he wrote one back which was subsequently framed). However, this dream of mine had two problems: my right and left legs.

By the time middle school came around, I was taking ibuprofen almost every day. I would wake up in the middle of the night with pain so severe I could not walk. My parents would come get me from my room, carry me into theirs, and give me some ibuprofen. I have to go to the doctor's office. They recommend seeing a specialist, Dr. Black. My mom and I go meet Dr. Black and he orders some x-rays of my legs. I lay back on the examination table and he takes out a device to measure the rotation of my legs. That is when I get

the news. I am going to need surgery if I want the pain to go away. He explains the procedure to us. He opens up both legs, cuts the tibia, and rotates back to where it should be. He inserts a metal plate with screws to hold the bone together so that it heals properly. A second operation would have to be had farther down the road to remove the plates after the bones have healed. My mom and I go home and tell dad the news. We sit down, talk about it, and decide surgery is the best option; I need to get better. We schedule a date, October 31st, 2006. This would give me plenty of time for my bones to heal and me to complete physical therapy so I could play baseball next summer. This procedure was supposed to be simple. 4-6 weeks for the bones to heal. I would have to spend some time in a wheelchair and then a walker and crutches. I would complete some physical therapy and then I would be back and running better than ever. Unfortunately, I was not so lucky.

I went in for my first post operation appointment, and Dr. Black cannot find much bone growth. We come back a couple weeks later and same thing. This goes on for a couple months. I start taking a variety of supplements and use a device to help stimulate bone growth. Baseball season keeps getting closer and closer and I am not any closer to being able to play. Eventually, I get the bad news. I am not going to be able to play baseball this year. It is June and my left leg is finally healing while it does not look like my

right leg has made much progress. I still cannot run and I have just gotten to the point of walking without my walker. But, that is not going to stop me from being involved in the sport I love. I start keeping books while my dad coaches. I get books from the library and start reading about baseball and its history. During this time, I learn about the Negro Baseball League and develop a deep interest in it. I continue to read more and more about this time in American history. It made no sense to me why we had two separate baseball leagues. I was only in 6th grade and it seemed silly to me that people couldn't play baseball together.

During this summer, the Brewers were celebrating the 25th anniversary of our last World Series appearance. This meant every Friday home game, they would wear their retro uniforms and open up the gates an extra hour earlier and have several players come out and sign autographs. So, one Friday, my mom and I got my grandpa's tickets (he has season tickets), to go to the game so I could get Geoff Jenkins autograph, my favorite player at the time. I show up to the ball park and get in line in my walker. Unfortunately, you cannot go very fast in a walker so after we get through the gates we end up in the back of the line for Geoff Jenkins. I end up not being able to get his autograph and the disappointment sets in. I am not disappointed with him or with the Brewers. I am disappointed with myself. I start blaming myself for not being able to get there fast enough. If only my

legs were better, if only I did not have this disability, I would be fine. My mom experiences a different frustration. She writes a letter to the Brewers about my experience and not being able to get the autograph because it was hard to move around in my walker. She recognized what I did not see yet; the disadvantage I faced in places like Miller Park because of my disability.

We end up hearing back from the Brewers manager of Guest Relations apologizing for the experience I had. He gives us free tickets in the handicapped seats and tells us to come to guest relations next time. So that next Friday home game we show up at Guest Relations and he comes out and tells us we are going on the field. He has a wheelchair for me so I do not have to walk the whole way. He takes my mom and I along with a few other people in wheelchairs down onto the field and we get to go up to each player and get their autograph. I was on cloud nine. Once we make our way to each player and head back to the elevator to go to our seats, he tells my mom and I to come to guest relations for each of the games and he will do the same thing for us. So for the rest of the summer, I come to just about every Friday home game and get to meet the players on the field. One of these games, as we exit the elevator on the field level, we are greeted by this great big pitcher. He stops and asks me why I am in a wheelchair. I tell him my story. Then he tells me his. He suffers from epilepsy, but he has not let that stop him from playing the game he loves. He takes a picture with me then signs an

autograph for me. “Keep kicking butt” He wrote. Luck would have it he was one of the players signing autographs that day. So when we make it all the way over to him. He turns around and joking says, “are you following me?” He signs another autograph, this one for my brother, saying “Joey, keep helping Andrew kick butt.” This small act of kindness continues to serve as my inspiration. If he could overcome his disability to play the game he loves, I could to. I would work as hard as I could in physical therapy.

But as the summer of 2007 neared its end, we had to meet with Dr. Black again. My right leg was not healed. It was time to make a decision. We could keep trying calcium and other supplements and hope things change or I can go back in for a second operation. We decide that it is best to go in for a second operation on my right leg. So in August, I have my second operation on my right leg. The little growth we had thought I had, turned out to merely be scar tissue that had built up. Dr. Black cleans it out and this time uses cadaver bone and bone from my hip hoping that will help spur some growth. We go in for that first post op appointment once again with hope, but once again face disappointing news. No bone growth. Same story as last time, I go in every couple of weeks and nothing changes. Dr. Black is shocked. This does not happen. He begins reaching out to his contacts searching for explanations. I start seeing every type of specialist having every type of test done. I undergo genetic testing. I get CT scans, MRIs, EKGs, blood work, and

so on looking for answers for why my body will not grow bone. My bones are decalcified so they are weaker. This came with decalcified teeth leading to frequent cavities. Additionally, my body would not absorb the calcium I was taking so I developed kidney stones on three separate occasions. During this time, I also develop recurring migraines that would leave me bedridden.

Winter comes and goes and it is starting to look like I will miss baseball once again. I still cannot run. My leg still will not grow bone. It was a very difficult time in my life. But during this time and through my experience, I developed my relationship with God. I knew I was not in control. I had no idea what my future looked like. I could not have made it through this time without my church, my family, or my friends. I found support all around me, even in our garbage man, Fred. He shared his favorite verse with me. Jeremiah 29:11 “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” I had no idea what my future held, but I found comfort in this verse.

During this time, my interest in the Negro Baseball League continued. I read all the books I could get. Then, my mom found Dennis Biddle. Mr. Biddle played in the Negro Baseball League right as it was fading out as integration was occurring. Mr. Biddle lived in Milwaukee, not too far from us. Mr. Biddle was, and still is, very active in preserving the history of the Negro Baseball League. She met him at a Brewers game and told him about me and

my interest in the Negro Baseball League. She managed to arrange a meeting with him where I was able to go visit him in his retirement community. We met and talked about baseball and the Negro Baseball League. The struggles he and others like him dealt with. At the end, he signed his book for me. After talking with him, I knew I wanted to tell his story and the story of the Negro Baseball League.

Spring comes around and we have that all too familiar meeting with Dr. Black. This time, he tells us he has found a potential option. There is this new substance showing promise. Bone Morphogenetic Protein (BMP). He told us there are risks associated with this, it has not been used much in minors yet. We could go back in for a third operation, use this, and pray to God it gets my leg to start healing. My parents and I talked and I said we should go for it. Later that spring, I have the third operation on my right leg, this time using BMP. We go in for that first appointment. By this time, we know better than to get our hopes up. Dr. Black comes back into the room and puts up the x-rays. For the first time, there's good news. Dr. Black shows us after just a couple weeks my right leg has almost completely healed. We are speechless. We meet a couple weeks later and the bone continues to heal. There is a light at the end of the tunnel. I begin physical therapy once again. Eventually, the wheelchair is replaced by the walker, the walker by crutches, and eventually, the crutches go. I am walking on my own for the first time in almost two

years. I begin the process of relearning how to walk. Then, I get to try running. It is hard. But I remember what Seth McClung told me, keep kicking butt. So I keep working at it. Eventually, I complete my physical therapy and I can walk and run without pain for the first time in my life. There is just one thing left; removing the plates from my legs. We schedule the operation for that December. I have the plates removed. Enjoy a normal recovery for once, complete my therapy, and that summer, I finally get to take the field once again. Nothing felt better than playing that first baseball game. I felt 'normal' again.

During that entire period in and out of wheelchairs and other assistive devices, I never felt normal. I thought normal meant being able to run around and play baseball just like my other friends. I thought that was normal because everywhere I went I did not feel like I was normal. People stared at me. People asked, "what is wrong with me?" I could not use the all the same entrances or facilities. I had to use the accessible entrances and facilities. I quickly learned not everywhere is all that accessible. I wanted to talk about my experience but I did not know how. Even though I graduated from speech therapy, I still did not have my own voice. I did not know how to talk about this.

In high school, to the surprise of everyone who knew me, I joined the debate team at my high school. I quickly fell in love with the activity. I never

expected when I was growing up that I would one day fall in love with an activity predicated on public speaking. Through this activity, I gradually overcame my fear of public speaking and learned how to communicate with others. More importantly, I learned how to advocate. I already knew what I wanted to advocate for. I already had stories I wanted to tell. I wanted to make sure the story of the Negro Baseball League was told and I wanted to tell my story. I want to be a voice for the voiceless. I want to make sure everyone has their story told. Throughout high school and college, I have continued to deal with disabilities and have had a couple more surgeries. I am now in pursuit of a J.D. to continue on my path to be a voice for others in the legal system.

While my experience with disability shapes much of my story and who I am today, I am more than my disability. In my experience, we have a tendency to focus on disability and define people by that. People have defined me by my disability, by my legs. I have been called a cripple, disabled, handicapped, and have even been called names from movies and literature. I got called Forrest Gump because he wore braces on his legs. I got called the tin man from *The Wizard of Oz* for the metal in my legs. While people want to believe that they don't look at you differently, they almost always do – even unintentionally. People saw me in my walker or my wheelchair, they saw my disability, and they would almost always ask what is wrong with me. But I

am more than my disability. I am a diehard sports fan. I love baking. I like playing video games. I am a student. I am the vice president of the Baylor Undergraduate Mock Trial team. This is my story and it continues every day.

While telling my story is autobiographical in nature, it still has some similarities to the fictional telling of a story of someone with a disability. If I were to write a fictional work about someone dealing with a disability, whether intellectual or, in my case, physical, it should still be written in the first person perspective. The character with a disability should have aspects to their character other than the disability. Maybe they really like watching baseball or maybe they like to play video games. It is important to make the character dynamic like Haddon's Christopher. The story should highlight the difficulties of living with a disability in society. While it is a fine line that must be walked, the story should still show that even though life is difficult, it is not a life of constant suffering. There are good days or moments and there are bad ones. Making the character too pitiable would fall back into the negative tropes seen in literature like Dicken's Tiny Tim. In telling my story, I attempt to show the struggles I faced while still showing some of the positive experiences and memories I have had because of my disabilities. Any work of fiction could include the same and, when paired with first person narration, have a positive impact on the reader.

Finally, I know my story is not the same as everyone else. I consider myself truly blessed to be able communicate, to walk and to run, and to tell my story. I recognize that not everyone with a disability has the opportunity to overcome their disability or to tell their story. The novels I analyze deal with intellectual disability which I have never personally experienced. I recognize that not everyone with an intellectual disability can tell their story and that presents a challenge to the storytelling process I have sought in this thesis. Even though the best practices I argue for may not be practicable for everyone in everyday life, authors nonetheless should strive to follow these practices and let fictional characters tell their story. In the real world, we should strive to provide an opportunity for people with disabilities to tell their story instead of someone else telling their story for them. If the only way for someone's story to be told is through someone else, whoever is telling that story should aim to follow the best practices so even if some agency is lost, their humanity is not. We all have a story and we all deserve to have our story told.

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