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The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon

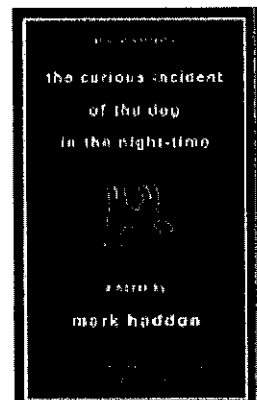
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About this Book

Christopher John Francis Boone knows all the countries of the world and their capitals and every prime number up to 7,057. He relates well to animals but has no understanding of human emotions. He cannot stand to be touched. And he detests the color yellow

This improbable story of Christopher's quest to investigate the suspicious death of a neighborhood dog makes for one of the most captivating, unusual, and widely heralded novels in recent years.

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Discussion Questions

1. On pages 45-48, Christopher describes his "Behavioral Problems" and the effect they had on his parents and their marriage. What is the effect of the dispassionate style in which he relates this information?

2. Given Christopher's aversion to being touched, can he experience his parents' love for him, or can he only understand it as a fact, because they tell him they love him? Is there any evidence in the novel that he experiences a sense of attachment to other people?

3. One of the unusual aspects of the novel is its inclusion of many maps and diagrams. How effective are these in helping the reader see the world through Christopher's eyes?

4. What challenges does **The Curious Incident** present to the ways we usually think and talk about characters in novels? How does it force us to reexamine our normal ideas about love and desire, which are often the driving forces in fiction? Since Mark Haddon has chosen to make us see the world through Christopher's eyes, what does he help us discover about ourselves?

5. Christopher likes the idea of a world with no people in it [p. 2]; he contemplates the end of the world when the universe collapses [pp. 10–11]; he dreams of being an astronaut, alone in space [pp. 50–51], and that a virus has carried off everyone and the only people left are "special people like me" [pp. 198–200]. What do these passages say about his relationship to other human beings? What is striking about the way he describes these scenarios?

6. On pages 67–69, Christopher goes into the garden and contemplates the importance of description in the book he is writing. His teacher Siobhan told him "the idea of a book was to describe things using words so that people could read them and make a picture in their own head" [p. 67]. What is the effect of reading Christopher's extended description, which begins, "I decided to do a description of the garden" and ends "Then I went inside and fed Toby"? How does this passage relate to a quote Christopher likes from **The Hound of the Baskervilles**: "The world is full of obvious things which nobody by chance ever observes" [p. 73]?

7. According to neurologist Oliver Sacks, Hans Asperger, the doctor whose name is associated with the kind of autism that Christopher seems to have, notes that some autistic people have "a sort of intelligence scarcely touched by tradition and culture --- unconventional, unorthodox, strangely pure and original, akin to the intelligence of true creativity" [**An Anthropologist on Mars** by Oliver Sacks, NY: Vintage Books, 1995, pp. 252–53]. Does the novel's intensive look at Christopher's fascinating and often profound mental life suggest that in certain ways, the pity that well-meaning, "normal" people might feel for him is misdirected? Given his gifts, does his future look promising?

8. Christopher experiences the world quantitatively and logically. His teacher Mr. Jeavons tells him that he likes math because it's safe. But Christopher's explanation of the Monty Hall problem gives the reader more insight into why he likes math. Does Mr. Jeavons underestimate the complexity of Christopher's mind and his responses to intellectual stimulation? Does Siobhan understand Christopher better than Mr. Jeavons?

9. Think about what Christopher says about metaphors and lies and their relationship to novels [pp. 14–20]. Why is lying such an alien concept to him? In his antipathy to lies, Christopher decides not to write a novel, but a book in which "everything I have written . . . is true" [p. 20]. Why do "normal" human beings in the novel, like Christopher's parents, find lies so indispensable? Why is the idea of truth so central to Christopher's narration?

10. Which scenes are comical in this novel, and why are they funny? Are these same situations also sad, or exasperating?
11. Christopher's conversations with Siobhan, his teacher at school, are possibly his most meaningful communications with another person. What are these conversations like, and how do they compare with his conversations with his father and his mother?
12. One of the primary disadvantages of the autistic is that they can't project or intuit what other people might be feeling or thinking --- as illustrated in the scene where Christopher has to guess what his mother might think would be in the Smarties tube [pp. 115-16]. When does this deficit become most clear in the novel? Does Christopher seem to suffer from his mental and emotional isolation, or does he seem to enjoy it?
13. Christopher's parents, with their affairs, their arguments, and their passionate rages, are clearly in the grip of emotions they themselves can't fully understand or control. How, in juxtaposition to Christopher's incomprehension of the passions that drive other people, is his family situation particularly ironic?
14. On pages 83-84, Christopher explains why he doesn't like yellow and brown, and admits that such decisions are, in part, a way to simplify the world and make choices easier. Why does he need to make the world simpler? Which aspects of life does he find unbearably complicated or stressful?
15. What is the effect of reading the letters Christopher's mother wrote to him? Was his mother justified in leaving? Does Christopher comprehend her apology and her attempt to explain herself [pp. 106-10]? Does he have strong feelings about the loss of his mother? Which of his parents is better suited to taking care of him?
16. Christopher's father confesses to killing Wellington in a moment of rage at Mrs. Shears [pp. 121-22], and swears to Christopher that he won't lie to him ever again. Christopher thinks, "I had to get out of the house. Father had murdered Wellington. That meant he could murder me, because I couldn't trust him, even though he had said 'Trust me,' because he had told a lie about a big thing" [p. 122]. Why is Christopher's world shattered by this realization? Is it likely that he will ever learn to trust his father again?
17. How much empathy does the reader come to feel for Christopher? How much understanding does he have of his own emotions? What is the effect, for instance, of the scenes in which Christopher's mother doesn't act to make sure he can take his A-levels? Do these scenes show how little his mother understands Christopher's deepest needs?
18. Mark Haddon has said of **The Curious Incident**, "It's not just a book about disability. Obviously, on some level it is, but on

another level . . . it's a book about books, about what you can do with words and what it means to communicate with someone in a book. Here's a character whom if you met him in real life you'd never, ever get inside his head. Yet something magical happens when you write a novel about him. You slip inside his head, and it seems like the most natural thing in the world" [<http://www.powells.com/authors/haddon.html>]. Is a large part of the achievement of this novel precisely this --- that Haddon has created a door into a kind of mind his readers would not have access to in real life?

19. Christopher's journey to London underscores the difficulties he has being on his own, and the real disadvantages of his condition in terms of being in the world. What is most frightening, disturbing, or moving about this extended section of the novel [pp. 169-98]?

20. In his review of **The Curious Incident**, Jay McInerney suggests that at the novel's end "the gulf between Christopher and his parents, between Christopher and the rest of us, remains immense and mysterious. And that gulf is ultimately the source of this novel's haunting impact. Christopher Boone is an unsolved mystery" [The New York Times Book Review, 6/15/03, p. 5)]. Is this an accurate assessment? If so, why?

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Critical Praise

"Gloriously eccentric and wonderfully intelligent."

—*The Boston Globe*

"Moving. . . . Think of **The Sound and the Fury** crossed with **The Catcher in the Rye** and one of Oliver Sacks's real-life stories."

—*The New York Times*

"This is an amazing novel. An amazing book."

—*The Dallas Morning News*

"A superb achievement. He is a wise and bleakly funny writer with rare gifts of empathy."

—Ian McEwan, author of **Atonement**

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New Discoveries in Autism Research

Discovery of antibodies may be key

By Joshua Philipp

Epoch Times San Diego Staff

Feb 04, 2006



AUTISM RESEARCHER: Dr. David Amaral, Autism Phenome Project Principal Investigator, Professor, Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, and Director of Research at the UC Davis MIND Institute. (Courtesy of UC Davis)

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- **Thimerosal in Immunizations May Be Linked to Autism** Monday, August 22, 2005

SAN DIEGO—David Amaral, Ph.D., of the M.I.N.D. Institute at UC Davis, gave a presentation on January 25 at Vista Hill where he discussed new discoveries in autism research.

He was invited on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Vista Hill, a non-profit corporation dedicated to

bringing psychiatric services to San Diego and whose services include helping disabled children and those diagnosed with autism.

Dr. Amaral is the Director of Research at the M.I.N.D. (Medical Investigation of Neurodevelopmental Disorders) Institute and he is involved in the largest and most comprehensive study of autism called the Autism Phenome Project.

"We are really excited to pursue this line of research, because frankly when we first started the M.I.N.D. Institute 5 or 6 years ago, I thought it was going to be decades before we could do anything practical. If this pans out, we might actually be preventing kids from becoming autistic in the next decade," says Amaral. "The quality of research is getting better, the tools are getting better, and I think that within the next few years, perhaps even sooner, we will see some really fundamental changes in our thinking about autism."

Autism is a medical disorder which affects the brain and other systems of the body. Nearly 1 in every 166 children born today has autism. To date, it's been difficult for researchers to understand autism since it has many different forms.

Some people have seizures, while others do not. Some have gastrointestinal problems, some have severe developmental delays, and some have normal or even advanced IQs, while others do not. Individuals with autism typically have difficulty with social interaction, poor communication skills, and exhibit repetitive behavior patterns.

Currently there is no cure for autism, and it is still unclear what the exact cause is.

The latest research at the M.I.N.D. Institute has been on a specific auto-antibody. It is known that if a mother has one child with autism, the likelihood of having a second child with autism goes way up. In a study done with about 300 mothers, it was found that 23% of women who have 2 or more children with autism have antibodies which are believed to be directed against brain tissue and lock up brain development. These antibodies are not found in mothers with the same number of typically developing children. It is known that if the antibodies are in the mother's circulation, they can cross the placenta and get into the babies brain.

In order to study this field, purified antibodies were taken from mothers with children who have autism and also samples from mothers who had the same number of children without autism. They then injected the antibodies into pregnant Rhesus Monkeys. The theory was that if these antibodies were the actual cause of the pathology, then they should see some evidence in the offspring of the monkeys.

After the animals were born, they observed their social behavior. The monkeys with antibodies from the mothers without autistic children and the monkeys with no antibodies were fine. When they analyzed the animals, they showed no abnormalities in social behavior. However, the monkeys who had received the antibodies from the mothers who had children with autism began to exhibit whole body repetitive movements, a common symptom of autism.

Some of the monkeys would do back flips repetitively for tens of seconds and sometimes minutes on end. Others would start twirling repetitively for several minutes. They had never seen this particular behavior in the animals before. Many kids with autism also exhibit repetitive behaviors, sometimes for minutes on end.

"Although this is very preliminary, we are very excited about this. You can make an animal with social impairments similar to autism. If you just wanted to perturb social behavior, just take their moms away and raise them in a nursery, but that wouldn't be autism. What we are excited about here is that this started from something which was different in the mom's with kids with autism. When we imposed it on the animals we saw pathological behavior. We still don't know what the antibodies are, but we are trying to figure that out," explains Amaral.

"If we can detect these antibodies and it really turns out to be a risk factor, we can do something about it with known medical interventions. For example, we could even remove the anti-bodies from the blood of the mother. Perhaps then, the child who would have been autistic because they had been exposed to these antibodies would not become autistic," says Amaral.



produced by Healthology

Asperger Syndrome: Struggles with Social Interaction

Written by:

Christine Haran -

Published on: April 11, 2005

You might think that you could recognize autism in someone without much trouble, but neurologists and mental health specialists are now realizing that many people with high-functioning autism disorders often fly under the radar.

Like classical autism, Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism are neurological conditions that cause impairments in communication and socialization. So people with these conditions might have trouble having a back-and-forth conversation or picking up on body language. Unlike people with classical autism, people with these disorders always have average or above-average intellectual abilities. In fact, it's thought that a number of historic figures, such as Albert Einstein, may have had Asperger syndrome and been aided by their ability to zero in on a given issue. But until recently, these disorders were not widely recognized, which is why more and more adults are being diagnosed.

Healthology talked with Marjorie Solomon, PhD, an assistant professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at the University of California Davis Medical Center and a psychiatrist at the Medical Investigation of Neurodevelopmental Disorders (M.I.N.D.) Institute, about how children and adults with Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism can learn to manage living in a social world.

What are Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism?

Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism are types of autism spectrum disorders. Autism spectrum disorders range from classical autism to milder forms like high-functioning autism and Asperger syndrome. Symptoms occur in three areas: language or communication, reciprocal social interaction—like being able to have a friend or to engage in interactive conversations—and rigid or repetitive patterns of behavior and interest.

To have a diagnosis of high-functioning autism or Asperger syndrome, you also need to have an IQ in the average or above average range. The difference between Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism is that individuals with Asperger syndrome don't have a language delay. In autism, single words aren't acquired before two years of age.

What causes autism-spectrum disorders?

Autism-spectrum disorders, in general, have a large genetic component. There are some studies going on now taking a look at environmental factors. I think, in five

years, we'll know more about environmental factors that might be responsible for what's being called a big rise in autism. Some people say mercury in fish, vaccines or living under high power lines or any number of things are responsible for the increase.

Are autism-spectrum disorders more common in boys than girls?

So far, that's what we think. The estimates range that boys outnumber girls from 9 to 1 to 4 to 1. Girls can be harder to spot, though, because girls tend to be socialized in our culture to fit in more and not misbehave. For example, some girls with autism spectrum disorders become very good at "pretending to be normal" and appear to function well, but they really lack a complete understanding of social interaction. So are we underdiagnosing girls? It's actually an interesting research question.

When are people usually diagnosed?

With autism, there is the language delay, so that's going to start to raise questions earlier. Asperger syndrome can show up later, because some of the kids are extremely bright and they just seem kind of quirky. They almost seem like little geniuses. We certainly see a lot of cases where it's not picked up until third grade or fourth grade. At that time, the demands of being someone's friend increase, and kids with Asperger syndrome have trouble adjusting and fall behind socially. Some kids with Asperger syndrome are really good at rote learning, so when reading becomes more inferential and math more complicated, the deficits become more pronounced.

Because Asperger syndrome wasn't recognized as a disorder until the early 90s, and because many health professionals are not trained to recognize it, Asperger syndrome is now being diagnosed in adults who weren't picked up as children.

What are the symptoms?

Autism spectrum disorders involve problems engaging in nonverbal behaviors like eye contact, facial expressions and body postures. People with autism spectrum disorders may not use them properly and don't read them well in other people.

They don't develop peer relationships that you would expect. I always ask, "Has this child ever had a friend?" That, to me, is always a red flag. By the time you get to third grade, you have to be able to have a conversation and share interests and show some reciprocity.

There is generally a lack of seeking out others to share enjoyment. But this isn't always the case. Many kids with Asperger syndrome actually approach others too much.

These children may also have a lack of emotional reciprocity, or empathy. So we ask, "Does the child not get stuff? When somebody gets hurt, do they laugh? Do they really just not get why somebody's upset?" That can look like defiance but it's really a lack of understanding.

What other kinds of behaviors might a child have?

They may have deep fascinations. Although young kids tend to have

preoccupations with topics like trucks and trains, in kids with Asperger syndrome, it doesn't go away. I've worked with some kids who are 12, and they still are very much convinced that [the children's TV show] Thomas the Tank Engine is a very important thing. Other children are deeply fascinated with topics like astronomy, cosmology or Japanese animation. They tend to memorize many facts about these interests.

They also might have rigid patterns of behavior. One boy would get upset if there was going to be an assembly at 10 o'clock instead of math. Or some kids need to drive to school a certain way or they get extremely upset. Another child we were working with was upset because his mother dropped him off at preschool in the morning and his father picked him up.

What are some coexisting problems?

Problems including depression and anxiety may occur with autism spectrum disorders. It's hard to know whether they are due to related brain abnormalities or some of the problems and consequences associated with autism spectrum disorders. Children with autism sometimes get diagnosed with attention deficit-hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) before receiving an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis.

How do problems change in adolescence and adulthood?

I don't think we have great studies on individuals with Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism in later life, though we are hearing more about people with Asperger syndrome in college. Some of these kids are very good at school. If you get the hang of school, the expectations are a lot clearer than they are in the work world.

I chatted recently with one mother about her son with Asperger syndrome. He did fine at a good university undergrad. But then he had several jobs where he could not understand the social expectations. At his firm, he had to work in teams. He did not realize the politics among his team members, so he would step on other people's toes without realizing it. His reviews repeatedly said, "You are arrogant and act as if you're the only who knows anything," but he really didn't get what was going on.

It's also complicated to maintain long-term intimate relationships. You have to be able to read somebody's nonverbal cues.

How is a diagnosis made?

Diagnosis has to involve collecting information from several sources, such as parents and teachers. The doctor should do a psychosocial history, finding out when language developed, what other kinds of symptoms were present, what kind of social issues were present, if there were any academic issues. A clinician should then sit with the patient and evaluate them with a standardized evaluation tool. The best advice is to go to somebody that has a recognized reputation in autism spectrum disorders in your community.

How is Asperger syndrome or high-functioning autism treated?

To help people reach their potential, I advise at least assessment and some form of

treatment in the vast majority of cases. One of the recommendations is a type of speech therapy called pragmatic language work, or knowing how to use language appropriately. In social skills groups, a form of therapy that often includes language pragmatics, kids get together and learn skills in the context of a group setting. For example if we're working on conversation, we're going to model a conversation by passing a tennis ball back and forth. We're teaching them to ask someone else about themselves, and not just talk about their own interests.

Cognitive-behavior therapy is a treatment that is being adapted to deal with the anxiety and depression. We are also experimenting with a therapy called parent-child interactive therapy to help children with behavioral problems and inflexibility. Sometimes we recommend others kinds of psychotherapy to deal with thinking issues, such as learning how to become better at learning how to broaden their perspective. Some people are experimenting with neural retraining literatures, such as recognition of facial expression of emotion done on computers.

Are medications helpful?

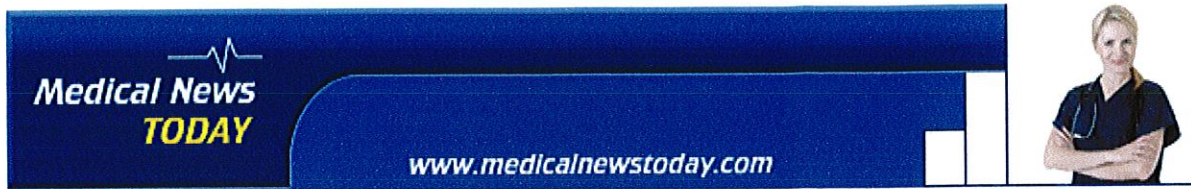
Medications can be helpful to deal with some of the symptoms. For instance, attention medications are frequently given to help kids to focus better and do better in school and not be so distractible. Sometimes, a class of medications called SSRIs is used to help with inflexibility, anxiety, depression or obsessiveness. Sometimes atypical antipsychotics are used, if kids are having a lot of behavioral issues. So medications can be helpful, but there's no medication that cures autism.

What is your overall advice to parents?

You want to seek professionals who have experience dealing with this disorder. They can follow your child as different issues appear in development. We can help kids with social skills that are appropriate to an 8-year-old but, when they're 14, the rules of the game change, and they usually need more help.

There's not a cure, but we are optimistic that with proper help and guidance, people with Asperger syndrome and high-functioning autism can have really good lives. And we hope that as we understand more about social cognition, more tools and medications will be developed that might be more specific for social interaction. This research has attracted a lot of attention, because neural scientists and geneticists really want to understand what makes us social beings; there are a lot of broader implications.

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Autism Gene Identified By Yale And Global Consortium

24 Feb 2007

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Yale School of Medicine autism experts [Fred R. Volkmar](#), M.D., and Ami Klin are part of a global research consortium from 19 countries that identified an individual gene and a region of a chromosome that may lead to autism in children.

The findings are published online in *Nature Genetics* and also will be published in the journal's March print edition. They are based on the largest autism genome scan done to date. The Autism Genome Project (AGP), including over 120 scientists from over 50 institutions who formed performed the research. The AGP began in 2002 when researchers from around the world decided to collaborate and share their samples, data and expertise to aid in identifying autism susceptibility genes.

Funded by Autism Speaks, a national non-profit organization dedicated to increasing awareness of autism and raising money to research the disorder, and the National Institutes of Health, these are the preliminary findings from the AGP's first phase.

The consortium used "gene chip" technology to look for genetic similarities in autistic individuals identified within almost 1,200 families. They also scanned the DNA to search for copy number variations, which are submicroscopic insertions and deletions of genetic material that scientists believe may be linked to autism and other disorders.

The researchers found a specific gene called *neurexin 1*. It is one of a family of genes that plays a role with the neurotransmitter glutamate, which has been previously linked to autism. They also identified a section of chromosome 11 that may contain a gene involved in autism susceptibility. That specific gene has not yet been pinpointed.

"We have known for years that autism is a strongly genetic disorder-this study helps us to significantly advance research on genetic mechanisms," said Volkmar, study co-author, Yale Child Study Center Director and the Irving B. Harris Professor of Child Psychiatry, Pediatrics and Psychology.

"The concerted effort of multiple agencies bringing together numerous research institutions has led to a new wave of genetic discoveries in autism that markedly change the landscape of knowledge about this highly prevalent disorder," said Klin, who together with Volkmar, coordinates the Autism Program at Yale.

"The discovery of genes associated with autism and their interactions needs now to set in motion an even stronger effort to develop new pharmacological treatments to change the natural course of this highly heterogeneous family of disorders of socialization," he said. "These are exciting times in this field."

Researchers speculate that there may be five or six primary genes and as many as 30 other genes involved in autism, although they recognize that this number could be higher still. They concede that it is still very early to model the ways in which these genes might bring about autism, but the rate of new discoveries is extremely promising.

Autism is a complex brain disorder that inhibits a person's ability to communicate and develop social relationships, and is often accompanied by extreme behavioral challenges. Autism Spectrum Disorders are diagnosed in one in 150 children in the United States, affecting four times as many

boys as girls. The rates of identification of individuals with autism have increased tenfold in the last decade, reflecting a number of factors that include increased awareness of the condition, broadening of its definition, and better educational services.

Phase Two of the Autism Genome Project was also announced to continue the effort to discover the genes that cause the disorder. This second phase represents a \$14.5 million, three-year investment by Autism Speaks, the British Medical Research Council, the Health Research Board of Ireland, Genome Canada and its partners, Canadian Institutes for Health Research, Southwest Autism Research and Resource Center, and the Hilibrand Foundation.

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Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time

Mark Haddon—born in Northampton, England 1962. Married to an educator with one child. Educated Merton College, Oxford, B.B and Edinburgh University, M.A.

During early career, assisted patients with multiple sclerosis and autism. Worked as an illustrator and cartoonist for periodicals, has taught creative writing, creator and writer of children's tv series, Microsoap. Previously had five unpublished novels.

Won Whitbread book of the year (2003) The award is chosen by the Booksellers Association of Great Britain and Ireland, with funds provided by Whitbread Breweries. Authors must be resident of Great Britain or Ireland., televisions awards for Microsoap. Primarily known as children's writer and illustrator. Book published in England in YA and adult version. New book is called "A Spot of Bother".

He says that he didn't set out to write a book about a kid with Asperger's—that would be the kiss of death. It would become an "issue" book and probably very dreary. He was just thinking of good ways to start a novel, of shocking images that make you sit up and take notice.

Haddon had started three novels at the same time, and wanted something gripping that would make you wonder what was going to happen next. Idea came from the image in his mind of a poodle killed by a gardening implement. With apologies to dog lovers, he thought it was really quite funny, but only if you described it in this very flat, neutral toneless voice. Wanted to tell the incident from a unique viewpoint. "The dog came first, then the voice. Only after a few pages did I really start to ask, Who does the voice belong to? C. doesn't get sentimental, he doesn't explain things too much. It's the voice of a person who's not aware of there being a reader out there.

The way he writes: constantly revising. Everytime sits down to work, reads and edits the previous 5, 10, 15 pages. Early chapters had been revised at least 50 times. Gets it from working in television, with constant drafts of a program.

The math, his mind, his obsession with colors and with food. They come from people I know. But even the extreme things he does, when he's under huge stress, he buries his head in the corner and groans—but almost everyone I know at some point in their life when they experience great stress does something ridiculous like that (lie on the floor, bang your head on the side of the bath). So C. is a patchwork of "normal" people.

He says C. as a narrator doesn't possess any of the things that a writer needs: empathy, the ability to see the bigger picture and make connections, or to understand more than the literal meaning of what people say. Yet his voice is actually a really good one to write in: it makes you not explain too much, just to say exactly what happens, and to paint a picture and leave lots of space for readers to make up their own minds.

For Haddon, the book is at a very deep level about coming to terms with limits.

Book combines humor, sensitivity and adventure of his earlier books with a highly challenging narrative perspective that impressed many reviewers. Reviewers appreciate this dispassionate voice because it forces the author to obey the caveat that authors should always "show and not tell" what is happening in the story.

Disparate reactions to the novel: "People have said to me that it's a desperately sad book and they wept most of the way through it. Other people say it's charming and they kept laughing all the time. People say it has a sad ending; people say it has a happy ending. Because Christopher doesn't force the reader to think one thing and another, I get many different reactions."

Book is in the production stages as a movie, with Brad Pitt listed as one of the producers.

Christopher: Possesses an extremely logical mind, is dispassionate, unable to empathize with other people whose feelings he cannot comprehend. A literalist. A very reliable narrator, because he cannot lie, but unreliable, because he cannot fully appreciate the motives behind other people's actions.

Other flaws include an aversion to being touched, but has an affinity with animals, hates the colors brown and yellow, an uncontrollable bladder. However, he is brilliant at math, loves puzzles, has a photographic memory. Doesn't understand metaphors or facial expressions. Deals with concrete thinking and has emotional "melt-downs" but must interview witnesses, deal with being accused of the crime, and negotiate a violent family disruption.

A fan of Sherlock Holmes—has to stretch beyond his comfort zone. Uncover the gray in people whom he has always seen as black or white, good or bad, trustworthy or not.

Structure of book: Numbers chapters with prime numbers. Chapters alternate between C's progress in the investigation and chapters that include puzzles, charts and other calculations C. uses to solve the mystery. The solving of the death of the poodle reveals more painful truths involving what has happened between C's parents.

The suspense is created not by the investigation of the dog's murder as much as by the circumstances that force C. out of his orderly, planned world into one where even the simplest tasks, such as making small talk provoke extreme fear and anxiety. An empathetic portrayal of C., though the reader is brought back to reality by the descriptions of C's parents' daily struggles with him.

Title refers to a Sherlock Holmes adventure about a missing horse from the short story "Silver Blaze".) . "Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?" "To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time." "The dog did nothing in the night-time." "That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes.

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Mark Haddon

1962-

Entry Updated : 08/12/2004

Birth Place: Northampton, England

Personal Information

Career

Writings

Works in Progress

Media Adaptations

Sidelights

Further Readings About the Author

Personal Information: Family: Born 1962, in Northampton, England; married Sos Eltis (an educator); children: Alfie. Education: Merton College, Oxford, B.A., 1981; Edinburgh University, M.A., 1984. Hobbies and other interests: Marathon canoeing, abstract painting. Addresses: Home: Oxford, England. Agent: c/o Author Mail, Doubleday, 1745 Broadway, New York, NY 10019.

Career: Author. During early career, assisted patients with multiple sclerosis and autism, and worked a variety of part-time jobs, including at a theater box office and in a mail order business; worked as an illustrator and cartoonist for periodicals, including cartoon strip "Men--A User's Guide"; creator of and writer for children's television series *Microsoap*.

Awards: Smarties Prize shortlist, 1994, for *The Real Porky Philips*; Book Trust Teenage Prize, Whitbread Book of the Year, Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction, Commonwealth Writers Prize for best first book, all 2003, and Children's Fiction Prize from the *Guardian*, all for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*; two British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) awards and Best Children's Drama award from the Royal Television Society, all for *Microsoap*.

WRITINGS BY THE AUTHOR:

- *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (novel), Doubleday (New York, NY), 2003.

FOR CHILDREN

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- (And illustrator) *Toni and the Tomato Soup*, Harcourt Brace (San Diego, CA), 1988.
- *A Narrow Escape for Princess Sharon*, Hamish Hamilton (London, England), 1989.
- *Gridzbi Spudvetch!*, Walker (New York, NY), 1993.
- *Titch Johnson, Almost World Champion*, illustrated by Martin Brown, Walker (New York, NY), 1993.
- (And illustrator) *The Real Porky Philips*, A & C Black (London, England), 1994.

- *Baby Dinosaurs at Home*, Western Publishing (New York, NY), 1994.
- *Baby Dinosaurs at Playgroup*, Western Publishing (New York, NY), 1994.
- *Baby Dinosaurs in the Garden*, Western Publishing (New York, NY), 1994.
- *Baby Dinosaurs on Vacation*, Western Publishing (New York, NY), 1994.
- *The Sea of Tranquility*, illustrated by Christian Birmingham, Harcourt Brace (San Diego, CA), 1996.
- (And illustrator) *Agent Z and the Penguin from Mars*, Red Fox (London, England), 1996.
- (And illustrator) *Agent Z and the Masked Crusader*, Red Fox (London, England), 1996.
- (And illustrator) *Agent Z Goes Wild*, Red Fox (London, England), 1999.
- *Secret Agent Handbook*, illustrated by Sue Heap, Walker Books (New York, NY), 1999.
- (And illustrator) *Agent Z and the Killer Bananas*, Red Fox (London, England), 2001.
- *The Ice Bear's Cave*, illustrated by David Axtell, Picture Lions (London, England), 2002.
- *Ocean Star Express*, illustrated by Peter Sutton, Picture Lions (London, England), 2002.

Also author of episodes for children's television series, including *Microsoap* and *Starstreet*; contributor to screenplay adaptation of *Fungus and the Bogeyman*, by Raymond Briggs. Contributor of illustrations and cartoons to periodicals, including *New Statesman*, *Spectator*, *Guardian*, *Sunday Telegraph*, and *Private Eye*.

Works in Progress: An adult novel, tentatively titled *Blood and Scissors*.

Media Adaptations: *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* has been adapted as an audiobook by Recorded Books, 2003, and is also scheduled to be adapted as a film written and directed by Steve Kloves and coproduced by Brad Pitt.

"Sidelights"

British author Mark Haddon was enjoying a successful career writing and illustrating children's books, as well as writing for popular children's television shows such as *Microsoap* and *Starstreet* before he surprised even himself with his wildly acclaimed first novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Ostensibly a quirky mystery novel about a teenager who investigates the murder of his neighbor's dog, the story gained the most attention for its narrative technique in which Haddon uses the viewpoint of an autistic boy named Christopher. Originally, as the author told Dave Weich in a *Powell's* interview, the idea of the story came from an image in his mind of a poodle that had been killed by a gardening implement. Haddon, who admittedly has a rather dark sense of humor at times, thought beginning a novel this way could be funny, but in order to make it work he would have to tell the incident from a unique viewpoint. "The dog came first," Haddon told Weich, "then the voice. Only after a few pages did I really start to ask, *Who does the voice belong to?* So Christopher came along, in fact, after the book had already got underway." It was a fortuitous decision that would lead Haddon to win a Whitbread prize, among other honors.

Even though the character of Christopher Boone, who suffers from a disorder known as Asperger's syndrome, is fifteen years old, Haddon originally intended the book to be for an adult audience. After having written over a dozen books for children over the years, he wanted to write about more complex themes. The resulting novel "was definitely for adults," he told Weich, "but maybe I should say more specifically: It was for myself. I've been writing for kids for a long time, and if you're writing for kids you're kind of writing for the kid you used to be at that age. . . . I felt a great sense of

freedom with this book because I felt like I was writing it for me." In presenting the final manuscript to his agent, however, it was decided that it would be marketed to both an adult and a teenage audience.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time can be seen, in some ways, as an extension of Haddon's previous books for children, some of which contain a good dose of mystery and, often, humor. For example, his debut children's book, *Gilbert's Gobstopper*, is definitely meant to be humorous and, in its own way, have a touch of adventure. When Gilbert loses his jawbreaker, the reader is treated to a trip from the gobstopper's viewpoint as it travels through sewer pipes, enters the ocean, is found by a fisherman, and goes on ever-more surprising turns that include a trip into outer space. "This irreverent entertainment will tickle many a funnybone," asserted Carolyn Polese in a *School Librarian Journal* review.

Haddon also combines adventure and humor in his "Agent Z" series for children that includes *Agent Z and the Penguin from Mars*, *Agent Z and the Masked Crusader*, *Agent Z Goes Wild*, and *Agent Z and the Killer Bananas*. The Agent Z of the title actually refers to a group of three boys, including Jenks, Ben, and Barney, who assume the secret identity as part of their club. The boys get involved in one goofy adventure after another, such as the time they take advantage of Mr. Sidebottom's obsession with UFOs by concocting an alien plot using a penguin and some foil, or the time the boys make a mock movie about killer bananas. Reviewers generally had high praise for these books. *School Librarian* contributor Alicen Geddes-Ward, for one, called *Agent Z Meets the Masked Crusader* a "witty, tight and brilliantly funny book." Adrian Jackson, writing in *Books for Keeps*, similarly felt that *Agent Z and the Penguin from Mars* was "a real hoot of a story, wildly imagined."

But Haddon does not view children as mere material for humorous stories. Some of his children's books show a decidedly more sensitive side to youngsters, such as *The Real Porky Philips* and *Titch Johnson, Almost World Champion*. In a story that *Books for Keeps* critic Gill Roberts called "powerful, poignant and pertinent," *The Real Porky Philips* is about a young, sensitive, overweight boy who finds the courage to finally assert his real personality after he has to play the role of a genie in the school play. *Titch Johnson, Almost World Champion* has a similar theme about self confidence. Here, Titch, who seems to not be good at anything except balancing forks on his nose, gains a better appreciation of himself after successfully organizing a fundraising event.

The rich world of dreams and imagination is explored in *The Sea of Tranquility* and *Ocean Star Express*. In the former, Haddon draws on his own childhood fascination with the achievement of mankind's first landing on the Moon in 1969. The boy in the tale has a picture of the solar system on his wall and fantasizes about what it would be like to be an astronaut. Combined with this storyline are facts about the actual landing, including interesting tidbits, for example, the footprints left there will remain for millions of years because of the lack of wind and rain on the Moon. Carolyn Boyd, writing in *School Librarian*, felt that "this book will appeal to those who remember the first moon landing and to young readers who will marvel at it." *Ocean Star Express*, by comparison, is not as grounded in reality. Here, a boy named Joe is becoming bored during his summer holiday when Mr. Robertson, the owner of the hotel where his family is staying, invites him to see his train set. No ordinary toy, apparently, the train takes Joe and the owner on a magical ride around the world in what a *Kirkus Reviews* contributor called a "sweet and simple story that young train enthusiasts will enjoy."

While Haddon received a good deal of praise for many of his children's books, including being shortlisted for the Smarties Prize for *The Real Porky Philips*, his *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* has brought him considerably more critical attention. It combines the humor, sensitivity, and adventure of his earlier books with a highly challenging narrative perspective that impressed many reviewers. The protagonist of the story, Christopher Boone, suffers from Asperger's syndrome, a type of autism that prevents him from being able to accurately perceive and interpret other people's emotions. While he possesses an extremely logical mind, he is dispassionate and unable to empathize with other people whose feelings he cannot comprehend. This makes Christopher both a very reliable narrator, because he is incapable of lying, and an unreliable one, because he cannot fully appreciate the motives behind other people's actions. Making the character even more complicated, Haddon gives Christopher other flaws, including an aversion to being touched, a hatred of the colors brown and yellow, and a sometimes uncontrollable bladder. On the other hand, Christopher is brilliant at math, loves puzzles, and has a photographic memory.

The novel is ostensibly being written by Christopher, whose school counselor has assigned him the task of writing a book as a type of therapy. Haddon becomes his character fully in the story, even numbering the chapters in prime

number order rather than sequentially because of Christopher's fascination for prime numbers. The story begins when Christopher discovers the dead poodle, Wellington. A great lover of dogs, as well as a fan of the Sherlock Holmes detective stories, he decides to find out who killed Wellington and why. The chapters then alternate between narratives of Christopher's progress in the investigation and chapters that include mathematical puzzles, charts, and other calculations the fifteen-year-old uses to try to reason out the information he has gathered. But as his investigation advances, the death of the poodle proves to be a knot that, when untied, reveals much more painful truths involving something terrible that happened between Christopher's parents and their neighbors and what really happened to his supposedly "dead" mother.

Critics appreciated the use of Christopher's dispassionate voice because it forces the author to obey the old writing caveat that authors should always "show and not tell" what is happening in the story. Furthermore, what interested many reviewers is that even though Christopher has autism, Haddon in no way makes this the theme of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Indeed, the word "autism" is never even used. Instead, the novel might best be viewed as an examination of "the process of writing itself," as Daniel J. Glendening put it in *America's Intelligence Wire*. The story's point of view allows considerable latitude for reader interpretation, and indeed Haddon remarked to Weich that people he has talked to have had amazingly disparate reactions to his novel. "People have said to me that it's a desperately sad book and they wept most of the way through it," the author said. "Other people say it's charming and they kept laughing all the time. People say it has a sad ending; people say it has a happy ending. Because Christopher doesn't force the reader to think one thing and another, I get many different reactions."

Although Haddon has had some personal experience in the past working with autistic people, he has admitted doing very little formal research when creating the character of Christopher. While many critics had no problem buying into the author's portrayal of the boy's condition, one reviewer, Nicholas Barrow of the *Spectator*, found it highly flawed. Barrow considered Haddon's descriptions to be a "total exaggeration of a fifteen-year-old boy with Asperger's," objecting to the "cliché" of an autistic boy who is a math genius, noting that Christopher is unbelievable as a teenager because he never thinks even once about sex, and finding the boy's problem with incontinence inconsistent with Asperger's patients. In the end, Barrow found the portrayal of Christopher to be "patronising, inaccurate and not entertaining," and that "some people with Asperger's would be offended by this book." However, if one considers that Haddon's motive is not to discuss the issue of mental or emotional disabilities, but rather to experiment with literary perspective and create an interesting story, then one would fall into the more predominant camp that found Haddon's narrator absorbing. As one *Publishers Weekly* critic put it, "The novel brims with touching, ironic humor. The result is an eye-opening work in a unique and compelling literary voice." "In Christopher, Haddon has tapped into a unique, yet memorable voice that lingers well after the last page," Jennifer Fish added in the *Florida Times Union*. London *Independent* reviewer Nicholas Tucker concluded, "How Haddon achieves this most delicate of balances is a tribute to his skill as a successful cartoonist as well as novelist." And Glendening called *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* "modern writing at its finest."

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- *Florida Times Union*, August 31, 2003, Jennifer Fish, "It All Adds Up to Great Debut Novel: Tale's Hero an Autistic Math Genius, " p. D4.
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- *Publishers Weekly*, May 13, 1988, Kimberly Olson Fakih and Diane Roback, review of *Gilbert's Gobstopper*, p.

273; April 25, 1994, review of *Baby Dinosaurs at Home*, *Baby Dinosaurs on Vacation*, *Baby Dinosaurs at Playgroup*, and *Baby Dinosaurs in the Garden*, p. 75; September 16, 1996, review of *The Sea of Tranquility*, p. 82; July 1, 2002, John F. Baker, "Obsessed by Sherlock Holmes," p. 14; April 7, 2003, review of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, p. 42.

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Source: *Contemporary Authors Online*, Thomson Gale, 2004.

Source Database: Contemporary Authors



Book Club Discussion Questions Printable A4 Page format.
The Curious Incident.. book review : Other Discussion Questions

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time. **by Mark Haddon**

1. Haddon uses the literary technique of the 'unreliable narrator' where the narrator gives a limited or possibly false version of the story, and the reader must work out the real story. What do you think is the overall purpose of using such a narrator in this novel?

Other well known examples of an 'unreliable narrator' are Ishiguro 'Remains of the Day' - the repressed butler and Helen Martin's 'Property' - the slave owner's wife. Can you think of any other examples of where an author has used a narrator that doesn't or can't give the whole picture?

2. In your opinion, has Haddon created a credible picture of someone with Aspergers or Autism? Why/whynot? Research and discuss what you know of these syndromes? Imagine what it must be like in your everyday life to have to think/react like Christopher? or to have Christopher as a member of your family?

3. Despite Christopher's many 'behavioural problems' - do you feel sympathy or empathy for him? What makes him likeable character?

4. "This is a murder mystery novel." p 5 Is it really?

5. What is the significance of the title? How does the Sherlock Holmes novels influence Christopher and how he goes about being a detective?

6. Christopher doesn't like 'proper novels' because they use obscure metaphor p5 and because 'they are lies about things which didn't happen.' p 24. Is 'The Curious Incident..' a proper novel? What makes something the truth or a lie in fiction?

7. Christopher's father lied about his mother. Why did he find it necessary to lie? Do you think he behaved badly by lying?

8. 'Intuition can sometimes get things wrong. But logic can help you work out the right answer.' p82 Does logic lead Christopher to the right answers? How important is intuition in reading this novel?

9. Is Christopher capable of change? Does his experiences help Christopher grow by the end of the novel? Has he overcome any of his behavioural problems?

10. What is your opinion of the ending of 'The Curious Incident...' Is it a satisfactory and tidy resolution as Christopher would wish for his novel? What do you imagine will be their lives in the future?

These questions are meant only as a prompt or a lead-in for your own discussion of the particular book. Don't let the questions dictate where you go - if your discussion goes down a path that is interesting, don't feel like you have to rein it back in for the next question on the list...! There are never right or wrong answers - your different opinions and views are all valid and important. Enjoy!

* Choose "Print" from your browser to print the document. Choose "Back" on your browser to return to the document.

The Horn Book Magazine, May-June 2004 v80 i3 p265(11)

Tigers and poodles and birds, oh my! Wynne-Jones, Tim.

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It's March 2003. An ad in the Toronto Globe and Mail brings me up short. "Kids love Pi too!" reads the heading. It isn't a typo. There's a picture of a boy smiling as he reads *Life of Pi*, Yann Martel's Booker Prize-winning novel. There are endorsements from three young readers. "Richard Parker is my favourite character," says a twelve-year-old. "Life of Pi is the first book I've ever read through twice," claims a fifteen-year-old. Winston Rosser, age thirteen, says: "This is a terrific book in which Pi wrestles with religion as much as with a 450-pound Royal Bengal tiger. It is eyeopening, original and fun."

Winston Rosser is absolutely right, but I'm a little stunned to hear this from a thirteen-year-old. Wasn't he confused by the shifting viewpoint? Or by a tiger named Richard Parker? What about the fact that it takes a hundred pages to get Pi good and shipwrecked? There's a lot of talk about religion and zoos in part one--absorbing stuff and very funny, to be sure, but to a teenager? And even when the adventure truly begins, when sixteen-year-old Pi is at sea in a lifeboat with Richard Parker, isn't there a long stretch in the doldrums?

Two months later. I'm in England, and another ad leaps off the book pages, this time in the Guardian: a full-page promotion for Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. The blurbs are what arrest my attention. Ian McEwan writes: "Mark Haddon's portrayal of an emotionally dissociated mind is a superb achievement. He is a wise and bleakly funny writer with rare gifts of empathy." Oliver Sacks agrees: "A delightful and brilliant book ... Mark Haddon shows great insight into the autistic mind."

Curious indeed. The blurbists are both writers I admire greatly, but surely they are from entirely different worlds. Then I notice that the book is being published simultaneously in the U.K. in two editions. Curiouser and curiouser. Jonathan Cape is publishing an adult edition; Random House is bringing out a children's edition--under the imprint of David Fickling, the editor of Philip Pullman's breathtaking *His Dark Materials* trilogy. What more do I need to know? I pick up a copy of the novel at Heathrow and devour it on the flight home. (It's a great deal tastier than the chicken and infinitely more entertaining than the in-flight movie.) It's the adult version; the children's edition wasn't in the airport bookstore. I'm far too taken by the story and by the extraordinary voice of the fifteen-year-old protagonist to think of what, if anything, Fickling will do about the language in the children's edition. In truth, it was only upon rereading the book in the context of writing this article that I really even noticed it at all. The swearing, I mean. More on that later.

I can't claim to have seen any ads for Sonya Hartnett's novel *Of a Boy*, though it received a great deal of newspaper coverage in her native land. Unfortunately, there hasn't been quite the same kind of attention in British or North American newspapers. That's because, outside of Australia, the book is called *What the Birds See* and is marketed as a children's novel. The original publisher, Penguin Group Australia, didn't think of it as a children's book. They brought it out as an adult title, and as such it won and was shortlisted for all kinds of prizes, including the prestigious Age Book of the Year Award.

So, three crossover books, each occupying a slightly different position in the outer rings of the juvenile market: one as a promotional afterthought, one as a co-publication, and one that has been, in a sense, co-opted from the adult market. In North America, only Hartnett's book is likely to receive much press in the kids' lit ghetto. Martel and Haddon have garnered rave reviews and sold exceedingly well. But they are less likely to come to the attention of those among us who take pleasure in putting great books into the hands of children. Addressing that oversight is the purpose of this article--partially, at least. But I am also interested in the walls that marketing inadvertently creates, the problem of targeting a readership that, while obviously convenient, is quite often restrictive, if not proscriptive. It can be argued, justifiably, that children will discover the books they want to read regardless of where those books are shelved. Kids don't really care much about reviews; word of mouth is the ultimate marketing tool. Think of this article, then, as one reader shouting over the wall to another, "Hey, take a look at this!"

But wait a minute, you say. There are already plenty of books for kids out there. Why would one need to look beyond what is recommended in the children's literature review journals? Well, here's a pretty good reason: these three books are splendid. Each is unique, thought-provoking, eminently readable. The language is gripping and not restrictively highbrow. Sex is not an issue in any of the titles (if that's an issue). There is some violence, but it is never wanton. In short, these are books that recommend themselves for young readers in all kinds of ways.

Kids, of course, read a fair amount of adult genre fiction: romance, horror, science fiction, and mystery. The books above are literary, but they are not literary in the way that, say, Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* or Jane Hamilton's *The Book of Ruth* are literary. They are not about cleverness or style or voice or decorative surface tensions--the shimmer and glow of the language itself. To be sure, each of these books is extremely clever and stylistically daring, but never at the expense of story. In an Ann Beattie plot, an ice-cube tray might be the most exciting thing that happens. Things are always happening in *Pi*, *Dog*, and *Birds*.

Margaret Atwood called *Life of Pi* "a boys' adventure for grownups." It wasn't meant as a backhanded compliment, but in a telephone conversation Yann Martel seemed to bristle slightly at the comment. Those critics who have not liked the book have, apparently, attacked the boyishness of the story, the exotic setting, how very much goes on. In their eyes, apparently, this facet of the book makes it somehow less worthy than the kitchen-sink reality that is the stock-in-trade of so much mainstream adult fare.

Bill Thomas, the editor in chief of Doubleday's adult trade division, had this to say concerning the decision to bring out *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* as an adult title in the U.S. "I certainly do not think the book is inappropriate for younger readers," he wrote, "but it is an extremely intricate literary novel and only the most precocious of them would be able to read it on the level of the author's intent."

As a writer for both adults and children, I find that I have myriad intentions, conscious and otherwise, that flower and transform as I write. I doubt any reader picks up on all of them. Reading, in any case, is not a science. I'm quite sure that Michael Jordan gets a lot more out of watching a basketball game than does the average youngster. Kids seem to enjoy basketball anyway, even if they are not precocious enough to grasp all the intricacies of the game.

Curious Incident takes place primarily in Swindon, Wiltshire. Hardly the high seas. But, as Christopher Boone, the protagonist, reminds the reader, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson stopped at Swindon station in *The Boscombe Valley Mystery*. *Curious Incident* reads like a first-class detective thriller but with a great deal more humor and style. It is a mystery on many levels.

Out walking at midnight, as is his wont, Christopher finds Mrs. Shears's poodle with a pitchfork sticking through it. "I decided that the dog was probably killed with the fork because I could not see any other wounds in the dog and I do not think you would stick a garden fork into a dog after it had died for some reason, like cancer, for example, or a road accident. But I could not be certain about this."

Christopher is not trying to be funny. His seeming detachment is a manifestation of Asperger's syndrome, a form of autism. He is very smart when it comes to logic and deduction and not smart at all when it comes to understanding human beings. He has, therefore, the wherewithal to solve the mystery of the dead poodle but, unfortunately, not the sense to realize where his detecting is leading him.

As far as setting goes, *What the Birds See* is the least out-of-the-ordinary of the three books. Christopher in *Curious Incident* does venture out of the relative safety of his neighborhood and makes a terrifying journey to London. Adrian, the protagonist of *What the Birds See*, never leaves the unnamed suburb wherein he lives his utterly circumscribed life. But, having said that, this book is anything but prosaic. And the suburb in which he lives seems anything but safe. Part of what makes the story so compelling is that the novel is figured against a terrible kidnapping that has taken place not far from Adrian's house. Three children have been snatched while going for ice cream. That story, played out on the television, in the newspapers, and in the classroom, pervades Adrian's own story. There is a sense of imminence, of gathering storm clouds. There is, in any case, a whole lot of what John Gardner calls profluence; the story is always clipping along.

In addition to a plot that knows where it's heading, we tend to think that the sturdiness of the central character is critical in a book that a young reader is likely to find appealing. Sixteen-year-old Pi, fifteen-year-old Christopher, and nine-year-old Adrian are among the most remarkable protagonists to leap out of the pages of any novel I've read in years. Each boy is at once real and fresh, entirely believable, and, at the same time, not like anyone we know.

At the risk of being provocative, I have a hunch that part of the reason these books might be enjoyed by kids is precisely because they weren't written for kids. "I write for someone who is intelligent or curious," says Yann Martel. "A mind connected to a heart. My reader is me." "I wrote [Curious Incident] for myself, as most writers do (or should)," says Mark Haddon. "I write to entertain clever people," says Sonya Hartnett. "If I'm bored, others will be too ... and I don't care if the 'others' are nine or ninety years old."

As Haddon says, a good writer writes for himself. A good children's author is no different in this regard. But then a good children's author is going to be edited by a children's editor. None of the titles above has received that particular brand of editing that is visited upon books for children. There are limits imposed on the field of children's books, whether we wish to believe it or not. Yes, we pride ourselves on the grittiness of contemporary young adult literature, and we have some reason to be proud. We are liberal-hearted. We do not shy away from taboo themes or bad language. We publish bravely in the face of intolerance from illiterate zealots. But if there are not restrictions on what we publish as children's literature, there are certainly assumptions.

Language is often a concern, whatever anyone tells you. "Well, there is not a worrisome word in *Life of Pi*, unless you consider the following worrisome: frugivorous, durian, tiffins, oestrous, ordnance, and commensal. A child will not likely know such words. Neither did I. But there aren't that many hard words in *Pi*, and, as is often the case with a good writer, context explains most of them. In my experience, "difficult" literary books are often self-consciously so. Martel has far too much going for him here to waste time with lexical fanfare. His writing, while intelligent and worldly, is never self-indulgent. *Life of Pi* is a lot easier to read than *Treasure Island*.

In *What the Birds See* there is the problem of "foreign terminology." Something is tombola-sized; grass clags in wads to Adrian's shoes; somebody has a gooby stomach. The same is true in *Curious Incident*, what with jumpers and sellotape and people having rows and losing their rag. Children, I think, have less trouble with this kind of thing than some adults do. That's because children know that their vocabulary is far from complete. Kids meet new words every day; a few more are not an unbearable hardship. But unfamiliar words and syntax are not usually what we are referring to when we talk about the problem of language in a children's book. We are talking, of course, about cussing. In YA fiction it is generally understood nowadays that, for the sake of verisimilitude, swearing is difficult to avoid. Moderation is the key--that's our watchword. And the swearing shouldn't be gratuitous.

"Do you want to read about life or do you want to read about something else?" Mark Haddon asks rhetorically in an e-mail. He elucidates. "Kids of eleven can see/hear everything on television. Everything. Why should books pretend that this isn't the case? If a book offends you, you can put it down. And doing so is a damn sight easier than turning off your favorite soap opera."

It's hardly a new argument. But what is interesting about *Curious Incident* is that the swearing only ever comes from the mouths of adults. What's more, it is often gratuitous, just as swearing in the real world tends to be.

Christopher never swears. Swearing, as an embellishment of speech, probably wouldn't make any sense to him. He doesn't like lies, metaphors, or jokes, either. He doesn't understand them. Swearing, one suspects, would be illogical to a mind like his.

Taking a cue from the list-minded protagonist, let me annotate the problem. There are five words that might raise the eyebrow of the delicate reader; they are used in one form or another a total of forty times, to which can be added eight incidences of the Lord's name being taken in vain. You would find far more examples of coarse language in one of the relatively tame romantic mysteries of Elizabeth George. And yet I don't think a librarian would think twice about handing an Elizabeth George to a young reader with a penchant for mysteries. In any case, to think that this book might be withheld from a young reader because of a sprinkling of salty words seems ludicrous.

David Fickling noted in an e-mail: "Every young reader knows that swearing happens in the world.... in [Curious Incident] the swearing shows that the adults with whom Christopher interacts are NOT in control. And that gives the book much of its sense of truth and sense of humor too."

It is for that reason that Fickling decided that the text of the book he published would be identical to the adult version. "It is high time," he said, "that we allowed that young readers can tell the difference between actual swearing and reading about swearing. We seem to have no trouble understanding that they can read about killing, murder and death."

The only word in Curious Incident that might raise eyebrows--and it is used only once--is cunt. Its use is completely gratuitous. It is not said out of anger, nor is it a slur aimed at anyone. It is said in passing by a traveler on a train. This is important. It is precisely the kind of usage that a children's book editor would recommend deleting. And that, I feel, would be a mistake. Haddon explains: "Most teenage fiction has an invisible ring of safety built into it. However sticky situations get, however dark the material, little signals here and there give off the message that this is 'only' a kids' book. Don't worry. Nothing too bad will happen. Things will come right in the end. I didn't want that ring of safety. And the swearing is one of the signals in Curious Incident that it isn't there. I wanted the reader genuinely not to know whether something really, really bad might happen."

Another assumption that is made editorially in books for young readers is that the narrative should not stray too far from the central story. That is to say, it should be diverting in the whole but not in its constituent parts. And yet one of the great pleasures of Life of Pi is the plethora of information about survival at sea, the fascinating habits of tigers, or the differences among various religions. The doldrums I had recalled from my first reading turned out to be nothing of the sort upon a second reading. Pi's lifeboat is becalmed at one point, but the story never is.

In Curious Incident, our protagonist spends whole chapters discussing intriguing mathematical problems, difficulties one might encounter in deep space, dilemmas about the nature of perception. This isn't merely diversionary, it's downright didactic. There's even an appendix! No good fiction for children is supposed to be didactic, is it? The thing is, listening to Christopher dilate on a favorite topic is wonderful. His enthusiasm is charming and funny, whether you understand much of what he's going on about or not.

I sometimes think that this fear children's publishers have about books that go off on a tangent is based on an imagined target-reader with the attention span of a gnat. "Show, don't tell," children's writers are told, relentlessly. "Keep the images flying; don't refer to an incident, take us there." On one level this is undeniably true. But when the writer is very, very good, when the voice is spot on and the story deeply engaging, it's great to be told a thing or two or three. It's like when you meet a person with a beautiful voice and you don't really care what he says as long as he keeps talking. Imagine a children's editor writing to the author of Pride and Prejudice: "Jane, Jane, Jane! How many times must I tell you, show don't tell!"

It's widely believed in the world of children's fiction that the point of view should be limited, whether the book is written in the first person or the third person. Seldom does one encounter an omniscient narrator anymore in books for young readers. Kids don't like it, apparently. Kids, we are told, want to see all the events unfold through the eyes of the central character--someone around their own age, someone to whom they can relate.

For the most part, Pi is written in the voice of the protagonist, as is Curious Incident. The same is not true of What the Birds See. Sonya Hartnett leaps into the minds of several of her characters, notably Beattie, Adrian's grandmother (or Grandmonster, as he sometimes thinks of her). Martha Brooks does much the same thing in her YA novel True Confessions of a Heartless Girl, but it is far from common in books for young readers. There is this underlying belief that a kid just won't be interested in what a sixty-year-old thinks. Well, no, not if she is morbidly preoccupied with degenerative cartilage or mutual funds or what to do about a stain on a doily. But if we learn that Beattie has thoughts and dreams and demons of her own, and if we learn that she loves Adrian and wouldn't hurt him for the world but that she is frustrated and temperamental and seldom shows him the affection she feels, that "much of what is best in her is warped on the voyage from within to without," then surely we have learned a lot that we could not possibly have seen solely through Adrian's eyes. We learn objectivity. And we are going to need objectivity to try to come to grips with what happens in this story. (Or in life, for that matter.)

Undoubtedly, there are things in these three books that will be beyond a young reader. Let us say, then, that each of these titles is a deep pool. You can dog-paddle across the top quite safely and have a fine time. Or you can dive as deep as your lungs can take you. The twelve-year-old who loved *Pi* mostly liked the tiger. He says: "The author knows all about how tigers behave in certain situations. I learned a whole lot about tigers."

In a conversation I had with Yann Martel, he said that *Pi* was in some ways a religious fable. It was also a discussion of ideas, a meeting place, an agora. I like that, especially. In the agora there are merchants selling many things, and each customer is drawn to what he needs or, perhaps, what sparkles the brightest in his eyes. And there will always be the curious customer, young or old, who is drawn irresistibly to the mysterious stall in the farthest corner where the man keeps some growling creature in a cage.

Mark Haddon says in an e-mail: "As for the ideal reader.... I try not to think of such a person. If a book is any good it hopefully gets read by very different people in very different ways. (In fact, I think that is one of the defining marks of a good novel--its ambiguity, the number of different, often contradictory responses it can provoke.)" He goes on to talk about readers who have wept reading *Curious Incident* and others who have found it hilarious.

Just so. It's categories that fox us.

"What age is this book for?" the concerned parent asks, and most children's writers shudder. Nobody asks an adult writer such a question. Who wants to be pigeon-holed? I personally want to scream, "This book is only for children born in August!"

Sonya Hartnett's experience nicely addresses the pigeon-holing problem. In 1993, Penguin Australia brought out her first novel, *Wilful Blue*, as a YA title. Six books later, they published *Thursday's Child* as an adult title. "There was market confusion," Hartnett writes. "Booksellers stocked it with my other books, in the YA section in the dungeon of the store." The confusion, however, didn't stop Penguin from publishing *Of a Boy* as an adult work.

Julie Watts from Penguin Australia says: "The difficulty for writers of Sonya's caliber, who really ought not to be categorized at all, is that booksellers and book buyers do need guidance, and so we have this wretched business of having to pitch [and] package books to clearly indicate the audience." Watts goes on to say that although they brought out *Thursday's Child* under their adult imprint, "complete with orange spine," they also tried to have it both ways. "Sonya had a following in the YA area and she is frequently shortlisted for various YA awards. So we entered *Thursday's Child* for these awards ... [and] the book was seen as another in her usual YA genre, and so we closed the door to a wider audience."

Bill Thomas at Doubleday was canny enough to see that this might be the problem if *Curious Incident* was published as both a YA and an adult title. "In the U.S. market," Thomas writes, "a literary novel depends on reviews in mainstream papers and periodicals to garner an adult market, and we had some concerns that a simultaneous YA publication would send a confused signal to reviewers." David Fickling did not feel this would pose any problem in the U.K. What's more, by having two distinct editions, the book could potentially claim two points of sale within the same bookstore.

In a superficial way, *What the Birds See* could be considered the most adultlike of the three titles. It is the only one that does not have a happy ending. It is, for all its profluence, something of a still life. (One might morbidly call it a not-coming-of-age story.) It is a piece of magical realism, densely patterned and intense, featuring a far-from-heroic protagonist. Adrian does not end up getting his mother back or acquiring a pet dog who loves him for who he is, as does Christopher in *Curious Incident*. Nor does Adrian wash up on the shore of a new world, as does Pi Patel, where he is nursed back to health and goes on to lead a happy, fulfilled life. He ends up escaping the world, in which he feels so unloved, in the only way that opens up for him.

I am quite certain that there are many children's book mavens who would feel the same way about *What the Birds See* as Bill Thomas does about *Curious Incident* with regards to a young reader. It may be appropriate, but it would not likely be appreciated for its intricacies. Meanwhile, the children's literature listservs buzzed this past winter with chat about *Curious Incident*. And what was the concern of its many fans? That it was ineligible for the Printz Award because it was not published specifically for young adults.

It is confusing, the whole business. Mark Haddon, however, is thrilled to have two editions of the book out in the U.K. "It comes down to this one fact," he says. "You can write the most fantastic teenage novel with the most universal appeal and package it in the coolest, most adult cover possible ... and when the book reaches the shop someone has to decide which department to put it in. [An] insurmountable problem at present. Two editions skirts it completely."

Which leaves us where?

The world of the passionate reader is one of serendipitous connections, of leaps across genres, across age groups. It starts at a young age. I loved the Hardy Boys mysteries, which led me, in a way, to James Bond. That in turn led me, at sixteen, to John le Carre's *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold*. My daughter leaped from Baby-Sitters Club books to Philippa Pearce's *The Way to Sattin Shore*, to Jane Austen, to Carol Shields in only a couple of years. Anyone reading this article is likely a person who delights in putting books in the path of avid young readers. It's worth looking, sometimes, a little farther afield. Worth scaling those walls--the ones that marketing and our own limiting assumptions create--to see what's on the other side. After all, the whole idea is to find the right book for the right reader. I have spoken to serious children's book lovers who liked Hartnett's *Thursday's Child* but felt quite adamantly that it was not a book for children. They're right. Not all children. Maybe only the child who has far to go.

Tim Wynne-Jones has written a few dozen books for adults and children, the latest of which is *Ned Mouse Breaks Away* (Groundwood). A new novel, *A Thief in the House of Memory* (Kroupa/Farrar), is due out next spring. He is on the faculty at Vermont College's MFA Program in Writing for Children and Young Adults.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (Vintage Contemporaries)

(Paperback)

by Mark Haddon

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Editorial Reviews

Amazon.com

Mark Haddon's bitterly funny debut novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, is a murder mystery of sorts--one told by an autistic version of Adrian Mole. Fifteen-year-old Christopher John Francis Boone is mathematically gifted and socially hopeless, raised in a working-class home by parents who can barely cope with their child's quirks. He takes everything that he sees (or is told) at face value, and is unable to sort out the strange behavior of his elders and peers.

Late one night, Christopher comes across his neighbor's poodle, Wellington, impaled on a garden fork. Wellington's owner finds him cradling her dead dog in his arms, and has him arrested. After spending a night in jail, Christopher resolves--against the objection of his father and neighbors--to discover just who has murdered Wellington. He is encouraged by Siobhan, a social worker at his school, to write a book about his investigations, and the result--quirkily illustrated, with each chapter given its own prime number--is *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

Haddon's novel is a startling performance. This is the sort of book that could turn condescending, or exploitative, or overly sentimental, or grossly tasteless very easily, but Haddon navigates those dangers with a sureness of touch that is extremely rare among first-time novelists. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is original, clever, and genuinely moving: this one is a must-read. --Jack Illingworth, *Amazon.ca* -- This text refers to the **Hardcover** edition.

From Publishers Weekly

Christopher Boone, the autistic 15-year-old narrator of this revelatory novel, relaxes by groaning and doing math problems in his head, eats red-but not yellow or brown-foods and screams when he is touched. Strange as he may seem, other people are far more of a conundrum to him, for he lacks the intuitive "theory of mind" by which most of us sense what's going on in other people's heads. When his neighbor's poodle is killed and Christopher is falsely accused of the crime, he decides that he will take a page from Sherlock Holmes (one of his favorite characters) and track down the killer. As the mystery leads him to the secrets of his parents' broken marriage and then into an odyssey to find his place in the world, he must fall back on deductive logic to navigate the emotional complexities of a social world that remains a closed book to him. In the hands of first-time novelist Haddon, Christopher is a fascinating case study and, above all, a sympathetic boy: not closed off, as the stereotype would have it, but too open-overwhelmed by sensations, bereft of the filters through which normal people screen their surroundings. Christopher can only make sense of the chaos of stimuli by imposing arbitrary patterns ("4 yellow cars in a row made it a Black Day, which is a day when I don't speak to anyone and sit on my own reading books and don't eat my lunch and Take No Risks"). His literal-minded observations make for a kind of poetic sensibility and a poignant evocation of character. Though Christopher insists, "This will not be a funny book. I cannot tell jokes because I do not understand them," the novel brims with touching, ironic humor. The result is an eye-opening work in a unique and compelling literary voice.

From School Library Journal

Adult/High School-When a teen discovers his neighbor's dog savagely stabbed to death, he decides to use the deductive reasoning of his favorite detective to solve the crime. Employing Holmesian logic is not an easy task for even the cleverest amateur sleuth and, in Christopher's case, it is particularly daunting. He suffers from a disability that causes, among other things, compulsive behavior; the inability to read others' emotions; and intolerance for noise, human touch, and unexpected events. He has learned to cope amazingly well with the help of a brilliant teacher who encourages him to write a book. This is his book-a murder mystery that is so much more. Christopher's voice is clear and logical, his descriptions spare and to the point. Not a word is wasted by this young sleuth who considers metaphors to be lies and does math problems for relaxation. What emerges is not only the solution to the mystery, but also insight into his world. Unable to feel emotions himself, his story evokes emotions in readers-heartache and frustration for his well-meaning but clueless parents and deep empathy for the wonderfully honest, funny, and lovable protagonist. Readers will never view the behavior of an autistic person again without more compassion and understanding. The appendix of math problems will intrigue math lovers, and even those who don't like the subject will be infected by Christopher's enthusiasm for prime numbers and his logical, mathematical method of decision making.

Jackie Gropman, Chantilly Regional Library, VA

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From Booklist

The hero of Haddon's debut novel is 15-year-old Christopher Boone, an autistic math genius who has just discovered the dead body of his neighbor's poodle, Wellington. Wellington was killed with a garden fork, and Christopher decides that, like his idol Sherlock Holmes, he's going to find the killer. Wellington's owner, Mrs. Shears, refuses to speak to Christopher about the matter, and his father tells him to stop investigating. But there is another mystery involving Christopher's mother, who died two years ago. So why does Siobhan, Christopher's social worker, react with surprise when Christopher mentions her death? And why does Christopher's father hate Mrs. Shears' estranged husband? The mystery of Wellington's death begins to unveil the answers to questions in his own life, and Christopher, who is unable to grasp even the most basic emotions, struggles with the reality of a startling deception. Narrated by the unusual and endearing Christopher, who alternates between analyzing mathematical equations and astronomy and contemplating the deaths of Wellington and his mother, the novel is both fresh and inventive. *Kristine Huntley*

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How I Write

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Mark Haddon

In novelists' continual quest for a distinct narrative voice, Mark Haddon struck gold with his smash hit *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (900,000 copies in print). The narrator is a 15-year-old autistic boy, Christopher, who understands math and science but not human beings. His resolve to find the killer of his neighbor's dog and the dissolution of his carefully ordered world are the heart of a poignant, funny story. Haddon, 43, has worked as an illustrator, cartoonist, painter, and award-winning television writer and children's book author. He lives in Oxford, England.

Other credits: 20 children's books, including many novels, the Agent Z series and the Baby Dinosaurs picture-book series.

Why: It's like breathing or eating. I'm not even sure if there is an answer to the question Why? It's simply who I am. But if I were pressed ... I guess it comes down to the near-religious experience I have when I read a truly wonderful piece of writing, whether it's George Eliot or Shakespeare, Jane Austen or Homer. I write in the vain hope that I can give something of that same experience to other people.

Process: I constantly revise as I'm writing. Every time I sit down to work on a novel, I read and edit the previous five, 10, 15 pages. Consequently, when I finished *Curious Incident*, the early chapters had probably been revised at least 50 times.

It's something I've learnt from working in television. Every script will end up going through at least eight drafts (sometimes for good artistic reasons, sometimes for annoying technical reasons). It's painful, but you soon learn that a script nearly always improves when it's rewritten. The same is true of a novel.

IMAGE PHOTOGRAPH

Finding a narrative voice: Having spent a long time inside Christopher's head, I've learnt some important lessons. Perhaps the most useful is this: Remove yourself from the picture. Put yourself completely at the disposal of your characters, your situations, your story. Don't give in to the temptation to show off or to indulge yourself. No one is reading the book to find out about you. Quite the opposite. A good book will help the readers find out more about themselves.

Ideas: Getting the ideas is the easy bit. If you're a writer, they flock around the inside of your head like bats. The difficult part is sorting the one idea that will work from the 99 which won't.

As for *Curious Incident*, I began with the very pragmatic and unglamorous determination to write an opening page which would grip a reader and make them want to keep reading. Hence, the image of the dog with a fork through it. At this stage, I had no idea that the narrator would be a teenager like

Christopher (he came along when I realized that the image was stranger and funnier if it was described in a monotone). And I think it was this which, hopefully, saved the book from being too earnest or sentimental. If I'd set out to write a book about disability, I suspect it would have been the kiss of death.

Advice: Read widely. Write huge amounts. And throw lots of it away. It's easier, and quicker, to write a new novel than to rescue one which isn't working. Believe me. I know. But don't worry. None of the good stuff is ever lost. It just sits at the back of your head waiting until you can use it again.

Find good readers and use them regularly. They're the ones who give you criticism which chimes with the secret doubts you've been having all along. Whatever else writing might be about, it has to entertain. And if you've got yourself a good reader, you can check that out right now.

writermag.com

For more from Mark Haddon, go to The Writer Web site.

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A 'Curious' Coincidence

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In Britain, young adult readers read Mark Haddon's novel at the same time as grownups

IMAGE PHOTOGRAPH

In Britain, Christopher John Francis Boone, the protagonist of Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, so captivated the British publishing industry that when his story was published, in 2003, it was printed in two editions—one for adults and one for young adults.

The manuscript, about an autistic savant who investigates the death of a neighborhood pet, was offered to adult (Jonathan Cape) and young adult (Random House) at the same time. According to David Fickling, Haddon's YA editor, the working out of the deal was a curious incident of corporate synergy. "Because {Dan Franklin at Jonathan Cape} and I wanted Mark and his book so much and as we are all part of Random House, we decided—though I can't remember who suggested it, perhaps Mark himself—that the best thing to do was that we should both publish: so we did both an adult and a young people's edition. Voila!

There was no concern, apparently, that making the book available to two kinds of readers would hinder its sales potential. Each edition had its own jacket design and the books were sold in different sections of bookstores. Says Fickling, "The literary novel market is so different to the children's book market here in the U.K. that they don't intersect much. Also, the sales profiles are very different. As a result, the book has gone absolutely everywhere."

In the end, the sales of *Curious Incident* among adults outnumbered those for young adults three-to-one.

When the novel was published in the United States, there was only one edition, for adults.

- ROBERT RORKE

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The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time: A Novel ; Merikangas, James R; ; The American Journal of Psychiatry ; 12-01-2003 ;

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time: A Novel

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The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time: A Novel, by Mark Haddon. New York, Doubleday/Random House, 2003, 226 pp., \$22.95.

Detective stories are a rather new invention in the world of literature. The first detective story, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," by Edgar Allan Poe, was published in April 1841 (1). The story lines of crimes of violence, the quest, and the overcoming of obstacles and tribulations may date back to Homer and The Odyssey, but the detective as hero is an innovation. The detective is usually a man or woman of Aristotelian logic, often a loner, and at least exceptional in some manner of intellect or creativity.

Now crimes are solved with scientific methods and psychological insight, as on CSI, currently the most popular drama on television. This show resembles a high-tech offspring of detectives Sherlock Holmes and Kay Scarpetta and is enormously entertaining. What accounts for the universal appeal of this genre? Is it the wealth of local color, obscure facts, and psychopathology or is it the rational process of deduction, the leaps of intuition, and the chess game approach to the diabolical mind of the killer?

Whatever the reasons, a story that can turn the whole formula on its head by being very exciting while ignoring clever dialogue, scenic locale, purple prose, sex and seduction, drugs and alcohol, and graphic violence is a remarkable feat of writing. This is the achievement of Mark Haddon's fascinating first published novel. Haddon attended Oxford, worked in a school for people with developmental disabilities, taught creative writing, published a number of critically acclaimed children's books, and wrote five unpublished novels before this one. You should not judge a book by its cover, but the back jacket of this unusual debut work has rave reviews from both Ian McEwan, author of *Atonement* (2), and neurologistauthor Oliver Sacks.

Why the success of this strange story? How is the murder of a neighbor's dog with a garden pitchfork the occasion for a book that stretches the boundaries of fiction into the realm of depth psychology and psychiatry? How can this work of fiction convey an understanding of the mind of an autistic savant (possibly with Asperger's syndrome) with an accuracy and authenticity rivaling Volkmar's text (3), and manage to do this magic in the course of a tale of mystery and self-mastery?

The 15-year-old protagonist knows all the prime numbers up to 7,057 as well as all the countries of the world and their capitals but cannot understand metaphors or facial expressions. He cannot stand to be touched by people but has an affinity with animals, which of course are more honest and direct than people. He has never traveled away from his neighborhood or ridden on public transportation alone, but he must go from the hamlet where he lives into London to search for his lost mother. This person with

concrete thinking and emotional "melt-downs" must interview witnesses, deal with being accused of the crime himself, and negotiate a violent family disruption, despite his mental and emotional handicaps.

How does someone write a novel without metaphor? How does someone who does not understand emotion express it with such grace? I leave it to the reader to figure this out, but I suggest that the "interior monologue" of Joyce or the plain-speaking poems of Frost are no more artfully done.

The first task of a writer is to choose the form of narrative: first person, third person, multiple viewpoints, flashbacks, omniscient observer, dialogue with description, etc. Haddon has chosen the first-person narrator format for this novel. This is, of course, the style Mark Twain used in *Huckleberry Finn*, whose vernacular is essential to the mood of the story being told, as it is in most autobiography. There are many other autobiographical and fictional depictions of mental illness and psychopathy, e.g., *The Thief's Journal*, by Jean Genet (4), and *The Butcher Boy*, by Patrick McCabe (5), but I know of no book in the voice of an autistic teenager.

Interspersed in the text are digressions into some mathematical factoids, which are themselves intriguing, and there is an appendix for those inclined to follow a beautiful mathematical proof.

The functional neuroanatomy of autism is lately being worked out, after a checkered history of blaming "refrigerator mothers" or reactions to vaccination and any number of psychological theories of etiology. An example is a functional brain imaging study that revealed lower regional cerebral blood flow in the inferior and frontal fusiform cortex areas and higher flow in the right anterior temporal pole, the anterior cingulate, and the thalamus (6). In addition to these advances, works of literature, including Freud's, are rich and essential sources of knowledge and understanding of the mind of the artist and of humankind in general. This novel is such a work; it leaves the reader entertained and awed by the artistry of the author. Perhaps it will inspire more psychiatrists and neurologists to seek to understand the diversity of thought processes that characterize the mentally retarded, the autistic, and patients with Asperger's syndrome, who are the most neglected and underserved of our patients. As for the layman reading this book, it may engender a new respect for those among us who appear odd, weird, or eccentric. At least that is my wish for this outstanding detective novel.

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The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time ; Ringold, Sarah; ; JAMA ; 12-08-2004 ;

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time

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Fiction, Asperger Disorder The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, by Mark Haddon, 226 pp, with illus, paper, \$12, ISBN 1-4000-3271-7, New York, NY, Vintage, 2003.

"I FIND PEOPLE CONFUSING," WRITES Christopher John Francis Boone, the 15-year-old boy with probable Asperger disorder who is the fictional author and narrator of this novel. In reality, people also find Christopher, and most children with Asperger disorder, extremely confusing. By writing his own book, Christopher tries to make himself less confusing and, through Christopher's story, Mark Haddon brings a new perspective to a well-publicized but poorly understood disorder.

Christopher, who is also a mathematical savant, sets out to document his investigation of the murder of a neighbor's dog. What starts as a simple inquiry quickly becomes a much larger journey for Christopher and provides a unique vehicle for the portrayal of his disorder. Although Christopher makes an unlikely protagonist, his attention to detail and logical, though concrete, thought processes initially appear to make him an ideal detective. However, it quickly becomes clear that Christopher is unable to read others' facial expressions, to think abstractly, and to adapt to new situations, skills required not only for being a good detective but also for most aspects of daily life. As a result, the suspense in this novel is created less by the investigation of the dog's murder than by the circumstances that force Christopher out of his orderly, planned world into one where even the simplest tasks, such as making small talk, provoke extreme fear and anxiety.

Although Christopher's exact diagnosis is never explicitly stated in the book (Christopher writes only that he has "Behavioral Problems" and attends a school for children with "Special Needs"), and not enough of his developmental history is provided to differentiate completely between the diagnoses of Asperger disorder and autism, Christopher most closely fulfills the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders, Fourth Edition requirements for Asperger disorder.¹ This lack of an explicit diagnosis highlights the spectrum quality of these disorders and shifts the focus of the book from the support of a precise diagnosis to the development of Christopher's character.

Christopher displays many of the characteristic features of both Asperger disorder and autism, including an inability to interpret others' emotions, an inability to understand jokes, strong food and color preferences (Christopher likes the color red but hates yellow and brown), a strong attachment to routine, and a typical performance on the Smarties task. Descriptions of facial expressions are absent, and the spare, straightforward style conveys Christopher's limitations in expressing emotion. However, Haddon incorporates enough additional details, including Christopher's preference for prime numbers, his drawings and maps, and an appendix with the solution to Christopher's favorite math problem, that Christopher emerges as a vivid individual rather than as a generic exemplar of this disorder. Although

Haddon's empathetic portrayal of Christopher sometimes makes it easy to forget the challenges that these disorders create, the reader is brought back to reality by the descriptions of Christopher's parents' daily struggles with him.

Although information on Asperger disorder and autism in the medical literature, in the popular press, and on the Internet is plentiful, this novel is an important addition. While nonfiction attempts to explain these disorders from the outside looking in, this fictional approach lets the reader imagine being on the inside looking out. Physicians and families may find that this unique perspective adds an extra dimension to their efforts to understand these children. While by no means a definitive work on the subject, this novel provides a readable, creative approach to a complex disorder.

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time is Haddon's first work for an adult audience. Haddon initially established himself as an author and illustrator of children's books and his first children's book, Gilbert's Gobstopper, was published in 1987. The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time was published in 2003, in both adult and children's versions, and the paperback edition was released in April 2004. The novel has received much acclaim in the popular press and has received numerous literary awards, including the Whitbread Book of the Year Award in 2003.

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The Bookseller, Jan 24, 2003 p29(1)

A young detective obsessed by detail. (Spring Highlights: Children's). (Mark Haddon's discusses his new book 'The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time')

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Mark Haddon *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (David Fickling Books, 1st May, [pounds sterling]10.99, 0385605870/Jonathan Cape, 1st May, [pounds sterling]10.99, 0224063782)

There is a buzz building behind Mark Haddon's new novel, which is being published simultaneously in a children's and an adult edition. The narrator is Christopher, a 15-year-old with Asperger's Syndrome, a mild form of autism. Christopher sees the world from a very distinctive perspective: he loves pattern and order, can only interpret speech literally, and feels very threatened by displays of human emotion or people he does not know.

The story begins with the death of the neighbour's dog, impaled on a garden fork, a mystery that Christopher--a fan of Sherlock Holmes and detective fiction--is determined to solve.

"I didn't set out to write a book about a kid with Asperger's--I think that would be the kiss of death. It would become an 'issue' book, and probably very dreary indeed. I was just thinking of good ways to start a novel, of shocking images that would make you sit up and take notice.

"Because I have a dark sense of humour, this picture of a dog with a fork through it came to mind, and I thought, 'That's quite gripping. It's also quite funny--but only if you describe it in a completely flat, emotionless voice, rather as if you were Paul Merton in "Have I Got News for You"! So I started using that voice, and thought, 'I really like it.' After a while I realised it was the voice of Christopher, someone who has Asperger's and is about that age.

"I deliberately did almost no research. I'd read two or three articles in the Sunday newspapers, and there are about seven simple facts about Christopher that define his Asperger's, which anyone who had read those articles would recognise. There's no secret knowledge in there at all.

"Christopher as narrator seems not to possess any of the things that a writer needs: empathy, the ability to see the bigger picture and make connections, or to understand more than the literal meaning of what people say. Yet his voice is actually a really good one to write in, because it makes you do all those things that we tell people to do in creative writing classes: not to explain too much, just to say exactly what happens, and to paint a picture and leave lots of space for the readers to make up their own minds. When I first started writing, I thought, 'This is going to run and run.'

"I think if they are honest most people, especially most men, have a part of their brain that works exactly like Christopher's. You start by alphabetising your record collection at one end of the spectrum and at the other end you can't relate to any human being at all.

"Most of Christopher's enthusiasms are my enthusiasms as well. I'm fascinated by cosmology, physics and mathematics. However, this book must hold the world record for the number of mistakes spotted in proof reading. If you're going to write a book about a character obsessed with detail and with a

photographic memory, you'd better try to have both-and I haven't got either.

"The book starts with a bang, has a big turning point in the middle, and goes racing downhill at the end. When I first started writing the book, I thought, 'Very few people are going to be interested in reading about a teenage boy with Asperger's in Swindon--I'd better make the plot as enticing as I can.

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The Writer, August 2004 v117 i8 p8

Writing for kids versus adults. (Take note)(Brief Article)

Full Text: COPYRIGHT 2004 Kalmbach Publishing Company

CHILDREN'S WRITER MARK HADDON, in an article he wrote for the London Observer, tackles the difference between writing for children and writing for adults. "I generally take the union line. There is no real difference. Writing for children is bloody difficult; books for children are as complex as their adult counterparts, and they should therefore be accorded the same respect.

"Young readers have to be entertained. No child reads fiction because they think it's going to make them a better person. If they want edification, they read Albert Hinkelbein. Bore children and they stop reading. There's no room for self-indulgence or showing off or setting the scene over the first 30 pages."

The same, he says, is true of writing for adults. "Like children, adults need to be entertained. Even those reading to make themselves better people would prefer to enjoy the process. They don't want an insight into your mind, thrilling as it might be. They want an insight into their own. Reading is a conversation. All books talk. But a good book listens as well."

Interview: Mark Haddon discusses his book "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" ;
LIANE HANSEN; ; Weekend Edition - Sunday (NPR) ; 10-12-2003 ;

Interview: Mark Haddon discusses his book "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time"

Host: LIANE HANSEN

Time: 1:00-2:00 PM

LIANE HANSEN, host:

During one of his adventures, Sherlock Holmes turns to the gentleman who has brought him into a case about a missing horse. The key to solving the crime is the curious incident of the dog in the nighttime. Author Mark Haddon thought that would be a perfect title for his novel about a teen-ager obsessed with Sherlock Holmes and the murder of a neighbor's poodle. Martha Woodroof from member station WMRA has more.

MARTHA WOODROOF reporting:

Four red cars parked in a row means it will be a very good day, but anything yellow--bananas, cars, stripes in the road--is bad. Fifteen-year-old Christopher Boone organizes his life around a set of rules that to most of us don't make much sense, and when he finds Wellington impaled with a garden fork, Christopher isn't horrified, he's intrigued. Author Mark Haddon reads the opening.

Mr. MARK HADDON (Author, "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time"): (Reading) It was seven minutes after midnight. The dog was lying on the grass in the middle of the lawn in front of Mrs. Shears' house, its eyes were closed. It looked as if it was running on its side the way dogs run when they think they are chasing a cat in a dream. But the dog was not running or asleep. The dog was dead. There was a garden fork sticking out of the dog. The points of the fork must have gone all the way through the dog and into the ground because the fork had not fallen over. I decided that the dog was probably killed with the fork because I could not see any other wounds in the dog, and I do not think that you would stick a garden fork into a dog after it had died for some other reason, like cancer for example or a road accident. But I could not be certain about this.

WOODROOF: Although his problem is never actually named, Christopher is coping with Asperger's syndrome, a kind of mild autism with a startling streak of genius. Christopher is a math whiz and a literalist. He can't lie or tell a joke, and most other people leave him baffled. Mark Haddon says he didn't plan to create such a hero. Christopher just showed up.

Mr. HADDON: I started three different novels at the same time, just writing the first few pages, and I wanted something that was gripping and that would make you wonder what was going to happen next, which is how I came up with this image of the dog lying dead on the lawn with a garden fork through it. And, you know, it was gripping and it was vivid. And with apologies to any dog lovers listening, I actually thought it was really quite funny. But it was only funny if you described it in this very flat, neutral, toneless voice. And I loved the voice. I started using it, and only about three or four pages later did I start to ask myself, 'Who did it belong to?'

WOODROOF: Christopher's fixated pursuit of the dog's murderer creates a wake of confusion. He's Chaplinesque in a way--funny, sad and poignant all at the same time. Haddon found that writing in the boy's voice brought other, unexpected benefits.

Mr. HADDON: He doesn't get sentimental. He doesn't explain things too much. He just paints a picture and leaves lots of space. And perhaps most importantly it's the voice of a person who's not aware of there being a reader out there. So when you're writing in that voice, you never try and persuade the reader to feel this or that about something. And once I realized that, I knew that the voice was gold dust.

WOODROOF: Haddon says no doubt his post-university experience working among people with emotional and mental challenges helped shape that voice. However, Christopher's various tics, obsessions and difficulties are gathered from people Haddon says would never be labeled disabled.

Mr. HADDON: The math, his mind, his obsession with colors and with food. They come from people I know. But even the extreme things he does--for example, when he's under huge stress, you know, he buries his head in the corner of the room and groans, as he calls it. But almost every (unintelligible) I know at some point in their life when they experience great stress is, you know, you have to go into the bathroom and you have to lie on the floor and bang your forehead on the side of the bath or something ridiculous like that. So Christopher's made up--he's a patchwork of, as it were, "normal," unquote, people. And only when you put those bits together do you get a person that people think has a disability.

WOODROOF: Mark Haddon doesn't label Christopher's oddities for another reason. He doesn't want to limit our relationship with him, make Christopher seem somehow less than fully human. Psychiatrist and writer Oliver Sacks, who wrote a laudatory blurb for the novel, thinks Haddon's fiction models the way the real world should be and used to be before we went diagnosis crazy. Dr. Sacks points to the old age of poet Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Dr. OLIVER SACKS (Psychiatrist): We would now say that he got Alzheimer's disease. But neither he nor anyone around him regarded his failing as a disease or a stigma, and indeed when he was asked how he was, he would smile and he'd say, 'I have lost all my intellectual faculties, but I feel perfectly well, thank you.' And the notion that one could lose one's faculties and yet be perfectly well and a full person, you know, I think has somewhat disappeared.

Mr. HADDON: For me, the book is at a very deep level about coming to terms with limits.

WOODROOF: Again, author Mark Haddon.

Mr. HADDON: I mean, Christopher leads what seems at first sight this dreadfully, dreadfully constricted life, both, you know, emotionally and physically in terms of his family and in terms of what he does day to day. And yet hopefully if you spend enough time in his head, you realize, you know, it's as big a world as anyone's world, and it's, you know, potentially infinite.

WOODROOF: As to why "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time" is showing up on best-seller lists in this country, it's something Mark Haddon understands...

Mr. HADDON: With huge difficulty. I mean, I think it's wonderful. But, you know, there's no sex, there's no car chases, you know, there's no courtroom climaxes. There's a dead dog and a journey on the underground train to London.

WOODROOF: It may have something to do with those four red cars. Christopher, with all his peculiar rules, manages to show the rest of us just how peculiar our own rules can be.

For NPR News, I'm Martha Woodroof.

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Book, July-August 2003 p76(1)

Little Sherlock. (Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time)(Book Review) Kephart, Beth.

Full Text: COPYRIGHT 2003 West Egg Communications LLC

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time ***** MARK HADDON Doubleday, 233 pages

CHRISTOPHER JOHN FRANCIS BOONE, THE superlative-earning hero of Mark Haddon's engrossing debut novel, is a fifteen-year-old savant with autism who's found a dog stabbed to death with a garden fork on a neighbor's lawn. The problem intrigues him, cries out to be solved. What's more: He's writing a "murder mystery novel" based on his investigation.

The book Christopher writes (which is, of course, the book that Haddon writes) takes us into the mind of a teen who can solve nearly impossible mathematical equations and enumerate the countries and capitals of the world but who struggles--and admits to struggling--with nuance, white lies and jokes, with noise or touch or direct eye contact. Of course, in order to solve the mystery of the murdered dog, this young fan of Sherlock Holmes will have to stretch beyond his stated comfort zone. He will have to navigate subtlety, uncover the gray in people whom he has always seen as black or white, good or bad, trustworthy or not.

In placing his protagonist in such a dicey circumstance, Haddon demonstrates a keenly empathetic imagination, a capacity to make readers see the "logic" that guides Christopher's investigation while at the same time making them want to protect the boy when the good-hearted pursuit is transformed into a startling revelation about self and family history.

I've never read another book quite like this one, in which so many risks are taken to such singularly fine effect. First of all, let's give Haddon, who is described in the book's promotional material as having "worked with autistic individuals," credit for what he knows about autism and savants. He's pitch perfect here in his presentation of the disorder, while at the same time developing Christopher as a true character, not a type. Let's give Haddon credit, as well, for the way he mixes compassion and humor on the page; the reader is not inclined to laugh at Christopher, so much as to muse, with the hero, over the many oddities of the world. Sure, we want to know who killed the dog. Sure, we have our suspicions. But the real mysteries here are the mysteries of the heart, and Haddon writes of these with authority and wisdom.

REVIEW RATING

EXCELLENT	*****
GREAT	****
GOOD	***
FAIR	**
POOR	*

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The Bookseller, Jan 30, 2004 i5113 p20(1)

The curious case of the dog that did bark: publishing fashion has helped Mark Haddon.
(Opinion)(Whitbread Book of the Year Award)(The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time)

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We hear a good deal about authors and books that publishers decide do not conform to the fashions of the moment. The implication is that the book industry is closing off opportunities for all but those conforming to the narrow definition of what it considers to be promotable. We hear less about the authors who are taken on who might not have achieved publication at other times, or about the titles that current fashions make easier to promote. Such a title is Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (Jonathan Cape/David Fickling), which this week won the Whitbread Book of the Year Award.

Haddon's victory is itself a product of this new climate. Until *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* won the 1999 Whitbread Children's Award, no children's title had been expected to have a chance of taking the overall prize. J K Rowling's novel lost out to Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf*, but two years later Philip Pullman's *The Amber Spyglass* became the first children's winner to be named Book of the Year. The notions that a book published for children might be just as good as an adult one, and that it might be rewarding for readers of all ages, had taken hold.

Those notions have been extremely helpful to Mark Haddon. One likes to think that a novel of the quality of *The Curious Incident* would have enjoyed success at any time. But it would have struggled harder to achieve that success before J K Rowling and Philip Pullman overturned publishing rules that a book must be for a particular age group. Whom is Haddon's novel for? It has a teenage narrator; although Christopher has Asperger's syndrome, he has a view of the world, as confusing and often threatening, with which many teenagers will sympathise. But the novel also employs a sophisticated irony to offer revelations about perception and about the adult world.

A few years ago, Random House would probably have needed to identify its audience before publication. The publisher might have decided, given Haddon's previous record, that *Curious Incident* should appear as a teenage novel. In that guise, it would not have enjoyed such strong marketing support, or such prominent critical attention; the Booker longlisting and the Whitbread Novel victory would not have happened. As it was, RH could bring out adult and children's editions, and even have them sold by different sales forces, in the confident expectation that the trade and the media would understand its strategy.

Some fashions merely promote the meretricious. The one for crossover fiction has helped an outstanding novel to become a publishing triumph.

Biography Resource Center

Entertainment Weekly, June 20, 2003 i715 p76

The Curious Incident Of The Dog In The Night-Time Mark Haddon: Debut novel (Doubleday, \$22.95).
(Books)(Book Review) Tucker, Ken.

Full Text: COPYRIGHT 2003 Time, Inc.

Byline: Ken Tucker

Editor's Choice

"I am 15 years and 3 months and 2 days," says Christopher Boone when asked his age. He is very good at what he calls "Maths"; his father has never had to write down his bankcard PIN: He simply told it to Christopher "because he said I'd never forget it. And it was 3558." Christopher doesn't like to be touched, and when asked questions too quickly, they "stack up in my head like loaves in the factory where Uncle Terry works." He is then moved to lie down on the ground and make "the noise Father calls groaning."

Christopher is, you see, a British boy with autism, and in Mark Haddon's entrancing debut novel, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, the lad narrates a short period in his life with brisk logic and rollicking or heartbreaking humor that in either case reflects the solemn literal-mindedness of his condition (when a train-ticket seller asks him how long he plans to stay in London, he replies, "Until I go to University"). Christopher solves a mystery or two, just like a favorite fictional hero of his, Sherlock Holmes. While the only initial crime to be solved is learning who killed a neighborhood dog named Wellington, the novel eventually encompasses Christopher's quest to determine whether or not his mother is dead, which his father has told him but the teenager cannot quite believe.

Haddon, a veteran children's-book author who used to work with autistic individuals at an adult training center, never goes for cheap poignancy or facile irony. He makes clear what a trial Christopher can be when, for example, he occasionally throws tantrums in public or vomits from overstimulation--but also how pleasurable it must be, on some level, to interpret the world from such an innocent, nonjudgmental point of view. Besides, Christopher also has an awfully nice way with a simile, as when he describes a policeman's hairy nose as looking as though "there were two very small mice hiding in his nostrils."

Haddon's technical masterstroke is in having Christopher narrate the story so that the reader must infer the true characters of the boy's long-suffering father; his school counselor, Siobhan; and his elderly neighbor, Mrs. Alexander, who helps Christopher in his mystery-solving once they get over an awkward initial period of learning how to converse with each other. ("I can't do chatting," Christopher says simply, and how many among us haven't wanted to say that to someone?) If *The Curious Incident*, through its careful accretion of Christopher's details, eventually becomes, as he puts it, "a mystery that isn't a mystery," it is also a novel that isn't just a novel. Haddon's book illuminates the way one mind works so precisely, so humanely, that it reads like both an acutely observed case study and an artful exploration of a different "mystery": the thoughts and feelings we share even with those very different from us. A --Ken Tucker

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The Bookseller, April 16, 2004 i5124 p20(1)

Mind the gap: Mark Haddon brings sense to the crossover debate. (The Bookseller)

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Mark Haddon wrote a brave article in the Observer last Sunday. Brave, because he dared to suggest that there was a difference between literary fiction and genre fiction. Most people who attempt to draw such a distinction find themselves accused of being raging snobs. However, Haddon has probably arrived at a happy state that makes him impossible to criticise.

Certainly, his novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (Vintage/Red Fox) might be cited in support of the argument that the best fiction transcends boundaries. It is a children's novel that also appeals to adults; perhaps it is more appropriate to say that it is a novel that appeals to most ages. It is a children's novel that is also a literary novel: at the British Book Awards last week, it won Nibbles in both these categories. And it is a literary novel that is also a commercial novel: boasting the Whitbread Book of the Year and heavyweight literary acclaim, it sits on top of the Nielsen BookScan chart, and will be one of the bestselling paperbacks of the year.

Mr Haddon wrote a good many children's books before he produced *Curious Incident*. He knows when he is writing a genre book and when he is writing one with other ambitions. "Genre fiction says, 'Forget the gas bill. Forget the office politics. Pretend you're a spy. Pretend you're a courtesan. Pretend you're the owner of a crumbling gothic mansion on this worryingly foggy promontary.' Literary fiction says: 'Bad luck. You're stuck with who you are, just as these people are stuck with who they are. But use your imagination and you'll see that even the most narrow, humdrum lives are infinite in scope if you examine them with enough care.'" His writing for children is as functional as a good chair; *Curious Incident* is less shapely, but speaks, particularly to adult readers, of how we deal with the limitations of our lives. "It's not a difference between one book and another, or between one reader and another. It's a difference between ways of writing and ways of reading."

Mr Haddon's lucid article is the sanest contribution for some time to a debate that flares up at regular intervals. In the Washington Post recently, Anne Applebaum, author of the critically acclaimed and prize-winning *Gulag* (Penguin), wrote about what she saw as a divide between highbrow and popular culture. "There are still a few 'crossover' writers, mostly writers of excellent popular books about American history, and one or two novelists. But my sense is that their numbers are shrinking, that there's almost no middle ground. Popular culture now hates high culture so much that it campaigns aggressively against it. High culture now fears popular culture so much that it insulates itself deliberately from it."

Surely this argument is mistaken, at least in part. The bestseller lists belie it. *Curious Incident*, *White Teeth*, *Birdsong*, *Stalingrad*, *The Victorians*, *Longitude*--the list of such crossover books is long. But Ms Applebaum is right about the resentment that this debate generates. Popularity evokes critical suspicion; literary values evoke charges of elitism.

Mark Haddon sounds a sane note. His insistence on distinctions does not imply an insistence on hierarchies, or a denial that certain books cross boundaries. The book industry loves crossover books. But the industry can also promote genre or liteerary books without apologising for the popularity of the

former, or the elitism of the latter.