

SCRIPTS, STIGMA, AND DISABILITY IN FICTION

A Thesis

by

DALLAS P. BRISTER

Submitted to the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Chair of Committee,	Jessica Howell
Committee Members,	Mary Anne O'Farrell
	Laura Stough
Head of Department,	Maura Ives

August 2020

Major Subject: English

Copyright 2020 Dallas P. Brister

ABSTRACT

This research aims to bring disability studies to light in the works of *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon. I aim to examine how the neurotypical modes of genre script uphold stereotypes of the protagonists of each novel, using David Herman's theory about genre scripts and Erving Goffman's sociological theories of phantom acceptance and phantom normalcy. Using Herman's literary theory with Goffman's sociological theory, I then, use disability studies as a lens to examine how these theories point to the stark stereotypes that are highlighted in each novel.

DEDICATION

To my brother, Austin, whom without, the inspiration for this project would not have been possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank my committee chair, Dr. Howell, and my committee members, Dr. O'Farrell and Dr. Stough, for their guidance and encouragement during the course of this research and for granting me the opportunity to carry out this project.

I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues in the English department for their support and for making my experience at Texas A&M a truly unforgettable one.

Thank you to my boyfriend, Chris, who has given me the tough love I needed when working on this project and for helping me realize my true potential.

Finally, thanks to my family for their encouragement and support and for putting up with all of my meltdowns over the phone.

CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES

Contributors

This work was supervised by a thesis committee consisting of Dr. Jessica Howell, my committee chair, and Dr. Mary Anne O'Farrell of the English Department and Dr. Laura Stough of the Department of Educational Psychology.

All other work conducted for the thesis was completed by the student independently.

Funding Sources

This research was funded in part by an assistantship awarded by the English Department for my time as a teaching assistant as well as a Texas Public Education Grant.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CONTRIBUTORS AND FUNDING SOURCES.....	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1. Disability Studies	8
2. <i>FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON</i>	13
3. <i>THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME</i>	27
4. CONCLUSION	41
REFERENCES	43

1. INTRODUCTION

What is it about disability that makes some neurotypical people so uncomfortable? Part of the answer is that it forces them to recognize a vulnerability that they do not want to admit. Or perhaps it is a simple unfamiliarity with disability that some neurotypical people find distressing. Neurotypical perceptions of disability are problematic because they cannot understand the disabled experience. To be a person with a disability is to be ostracized, in some fashion by society at large, through a lack of integration of people with disabilities into the larger, neurotypical group, or a lack of resources and accommodations for people with disabilities, or a combination of each. There is also certain rhetoric surrounding disability assuming that people with disabilities cannot possibly understand certain situations or that they cannot comprehend what is going on around them. This lack of society's views and understanding of what it means to be a person with a disability is one way in which stigma about disability gets propagated.

However, fiction can act as a tool to break down the stigma surrounding disability by allowing the main character who possess a disability to be the protagonist, developing and growing throughout the story, or allowing the character who is disabled to become the hero, giving more relatability to readers who are not disabled as well as inclusivity to readers who do possess a disability. Ideally, this would create more empathy in readers who are unfamiliar with disability, enabling them to find common ground. While using fiction to create empathy and inclusivity may seem a noble task, it

also poses certain limitations because of the neurotypical author's and the reader's perception of what possessing such a disability is like. They cannot truly understand these experiences, no matter how sympathetic they may be towards those who do possess a disability. Using disability studies as a framework to understand the fictional portrayals of mentally disabled characters, I examine how these portrayals pose certain limitations and stigmas when trying to create honest representations of such characters. This creates a problem within literary studies because to take on the voice of a character with a disability, makes for a more contrived story. Therefore, when an author writes a story from the perspective of a character with a disability using normative ideals, it upholds stereotypes of people who have disabilities. In this essay, I argue how *Flowers for Algernon* (1966) by Daniel Keyes and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) by Mark Haddon uphold these stereotypes using genre scripts, which are normative in their nature due to their familiarity in the neurotypical world.

In David Herman's book *Story Logic: Problems and Possibility of Narrative* (2002), Herman takes an interdisciplinary approach to uncover how people understand narratives. He examines scripts, schemas, and perception to understand narrative structures. Herman cites a script as ““a structure that describes an appropriate sequence of events in a particular context”” (97). Herman writes that cognitive scientists have explored how stereotypical situations get stored in our memories, allowing us to interpret familiar situations (97). He uses the example of going to a restaurant as a sort of script. There is a set script that we follow when we go to a restaurant, such as being brought to the table by the hostess and having the waiter take drink orders first. Generally, we know

what to expect and how to behave at a restaurant because our brain remembers and stores previous times we have attended a restaurant: restaurants usually follow the same pattern of expectations where we can expect similar outcomes. Another way we can understand genre scripts is to think of a fairy tale. A fairy tale usually has a beautiful, young girl as the protagonist who is mistreated by an evil, jealous villain (an evil stepmother or a wicked witch for example). A handsome prince comes to her rescue, and they live happily ever after. Western readers are familiar with the elements that make up the genre script of a fairy tale because we are told stories like these during childhood, we see them recreated in films, and read stories with these elements. Even if a new twist is put on a classic story, the same elements are still there, making it a familiar script. These scripts, as well as Herman's theory about them, are based on normative experiences and ideas which do not account for disability.

So, what happens when the protagonist does not fit into the mold that the genre script has set up? Novels like *Flowers for Algernon* and *The Curious Incident* alter the conventions of these genre scripts. In addition to Herman's theory on genre scripts, I also use Erving Goffman's theory on phantom acceptance and phantom normalcy from his book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* (1963), to demonstrate how disability continues to be stigmatized when breakages in genre scripts occur. To reiterate Herman, what we deem "familiar experiences" arise out of common, normative experiences. If we see scripts as synonymous with "familiar experiences" then, we can argue that scripts arise out of normative experiences and perceptions. This only further

perpetuates normative expectations and assumptions of what should happen in these novels.

In Mikhail Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination* (1988), he discusses the literary trope of the character who does not understand. People with disabilities inherently fit this trope because they, in certain instances, do not understand. The device of "not understanding" is a character trope that assumes a set of norms of how the character should or will behave. This device also attempts to expose conventions "in everyday life, mores, politics, art and so on" where the character is "portrayed from the point of view of a man who neither participates nor understands" such social conventions (Bakhtin, 164). Using this trope only further disengages readers from these characters with disabilities because it only exploits their disability. The characters who have disabilities do not only "not understand" – they cannot understand, not because they are unwilling to participate in these conventions but are excluded from doing so. Having characters with disabilities possess this trope is unfair in that it traps them into being seen as people who are incapable of understanding. Because genre scripts set ordinary readers up to see these characters through neurotypical lenses, the neurotypical reader cannot see past these tropes, while the character with a disability cannot escape them.

Erving Goffman's theories in his book *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity* of phantom acceptance and phantom normalcy are in communication with David Herman's theory about genre scripts. Reading them together allows us to observe how genre scripts act as a form of phantom acceptance. Putting these two theories together to examine *Flowers for Algernon* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog*

in the Night-Time allows for a sociological understanding of the way such genre scripts can further isolate people who have disabilities and uphold commonplace expectations for certain outcomes. Using Erving Goffman to frame my argument, I examine how his idea about what he terms “phantom acceptance” leads to “phantom normalcy.” This idea, as Goffman claims, encourages people with disabilities to conform to the best of their ability to normal society without embarking on activities that are deemed too “normal” for them to participate in. This allows people with disabilities to be a part of the “normal” group but only so long as it allows the neurotypical to remain comfortable. Once a situation becomes uncomfortable, the people who have disabilities are put back in the confines of their disability. Essentially, people with disabilities are only allowed into the normal world until they can no longer serve a purpose, meaning they will never be normal enough to be accepted fully by their normal peers. Their acceptance is conditional on the basis that the person with a disability knows when they fit and do not fit into the group which, if we are using Bakhtin’s trope of the person who does not understand, then the person with a disability cannot decipher between when they belong and when they do not.

From a narratological perspective, this alternating between acceptance and nonacceptance comes when the narration of each novel veers off into territory not traditional with their respective genre scripts. *Flowers for Algernon* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* both illustrate Goffman’s model of the phantom normal and phantom acceptance by allowing the two protagonists, Charlie and Christopher, to be in these normal worlds (genre) but not completely integrated into

them because their disabilities cause an interruption or discomfort in the structure of these worlds. In *Flowers for Algernon*, Charlie's disability causes discomfort in the reader when he undergoes an experimental surgery and transitions from being intellectually underdeveloped to being extremely smart in a matter of months. The surgery in itself is an injustice: his sister Norma gives consent for Charlie to undergo this surgery since it is believed Charlie is incapable of making the decision for himself. In *The Curious Incident*, Christopher's autism brings discomfort to every character in the novel, whether it is because he misreads a certain situation, does not understand what is being asked of him, or is unsure about himself. Each time this discomfort comes into being, it only highlights Christopher's difference, leaving neurotypical readers to shy away from having a connection with Christopher.

Using *Flowers for Algernon* by Daniel Keyes and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon, I unite the theories of Goffman and Herman to justify my argument that using Goffman's sociological approach to stigma with Herman's narratological theory shows that these genre scripts create a false acceptance of these characters because of the societal standard of how people with normative mindsets understand human interactions. We see Charlie and Christopher fail at forming normative relationships because they cannot abide by neurotypical understandings of what this looks like. Looking at these two theories in tandem is important in understanding how neurotypicals' limited perceptions of disability can undermine the experience of those with a disability by relying on stereotypes as a means of understanding. The combination of Goffman and Herman's work gives a sociological

perspective about ableism and what general society expects from people with disabilities. Combining this sociological view with the literary shows how ableism and stigma towards people with disabilities are not isolated to strictly one realm, either only in the literary world or only in the physical world; rather the literary upholds the sociological standard that has already been set and vice versa. Goffman's sociological view informs Herman's narratological theory, and Herman's literary view informs Goffman's sociological theory.

My reasoning for this argument is that readers go into these genres (the hero's journey and the mystery novel) already expecting a particular set of normative values that arise out of the social scripts reinforced by the genres. They go in thinking they know what to expect and when those expectations are forced to deviate, it upholds this sense that the main characters do not belong. It becomes an endless loop of expectations and structures that the main characters cannot move away from. Both of these novels use first-person narration and genre as a key component to juxtapose the narrators' chaotic understandings of themselves and their worlds, with the genre scripts that are rigid in their normative structures. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* follows the script of the mystery novel and *Flowers for Algernon* follows the script of the hero's journey. Stigmatization occurs when the script deviates from its typical form because as neurotypical readers, we see directly from Charlie and Christopher, their failure to conform to the script, making them seem ill equipped to function in a predominantly neurotypical world. These perceptions general readers hold towards Charlie in Christopher are unfair because they fail to create a space of inclusion for the two

protagonists. Bringing awareness to this need for inclusivity is the aim of disability studies, to challenge standard perceptions of what functioning in a society with a disability truly means.

1.1. Disability Studies

In Lennard J. Davis's *The Disability Studies Reader*, his insight into normativity supports my argument that neurotypical modes of perceiving the world are a part of the problem that perpetuates stigma of disabilities. He gives a historical overview of disability, theories of disability, and personal narratives from people who possess a disability. In his introduction, Davis explains that his focus lies on the construct of normativity, not disability. This is a unique approach because his focus on normativity helps neurotypicals understand our own biases about disability, displaying how this construct came to be and how taking a "disability-studies conscious" approach to literature can help dispel the concept of normativity and create alternative ways of thinking about the "abnormal" (12).

With the rise of modernity (1840-1860), the idea of "the norm" began to gain popularity. When industrialization and technology came to the forefront, it created a need for efficiency and able bodies to work in factories, assembly lines, and other industrial jobs. With modernity came the field of statistics as it is understood today. Adolphe Quetelet, a French statistician who created "l'homme moyen" or the average man, coined this term by noticing "the 'law of error,' used by astronomers to locate a star by plotting all the sightings and then averaging the errors, could be equally applied

to the distribution of human features such as height and weight” (2). With the idea of the average being desirable because of its association with normativity, this created the trope that to be below average (or above average) in certain areas is to be undesirable. Being within the normal parameters of not only physicality but intellectual ability has left society in a panic that we remain on par with our “average” peers. If we think of the bell curve, where the curve represents the majority and the extremities represent the deviations from the norm, either being higher in a category or lower, create marginalizations when people do not fall into the average category. People strive for intellectual normativity and beyond because our society places so much worth on intellectuality. Grade point averages, grades, where one attends school, are all important in our society. When people fall below this category because they have a disability that does not allow for the same intellectuality, they are shamed or seen as being “stupid” or too dull to handle a job that requires more than the basic skills. Being above average in terms of looks or intellect is much to be desired but to be above average in weight, for example, is an instance of the above-average category not being desirable. Falling below average in the number of nutrients consumed on a typical day or in weight, for example, makes us feel as though we need to catch up to everyone else in our age category because of how the norms have been established.

As an example, in *Flowers for Algernon*, Charlie, falling below average in his intellectual ability displays this panic that society feels in wanting their children to be average or above average in this developmental category. This is why Charlie’s mother tried so hard to change him when he was little and why his sister gives permission to

have the surgery. These established norms are detrimental to those who have a disability because they will not be able to fit within the “average” category like their peers due to their disability. Any attempt to change or medically alter a person’s disability is to make that person feel as though they do not belong and that there is something wrong with them when it is actually society’s obsession with normalcy that is problematic.

Once normalcy became immersed in popular culture in the late nineteenth century, the popularity of the novel began to come into play as a popular means of entertainment. Characters with disabilities were seldom the main characters and served to evoke pity or the character’s disability diminished over the course of the novel, soon to be forgotten and of little importance. Davis asserts,

...that the very structures on which the novel rests tend to be normative, ideologically emphasizing the universal quality of the central character whose normativity encourages us to identify with him or her. Furthermore, the novel’s goal is to reproduce, on some level, the semiologically normative signs surrounding the reader, that paradoxically help the reader to read those signs in the world as well as the text. This normativity in narrative will by definition create the abnormal, the Other, the disabled, the native, the colonized subject, and so on. (9)

This normative structure of the novel has only highlighted what is considered abnormal and according to Davis, it is arguable that these structures have not entirely gone away. With these structures in place, novels like *Flowers for Algernon* and *The Curious Incident* are important in looking at how we place characters who are “abnormal” into

normative structures, genres, and ideals. Davis's critique of "the norm" allows neurotypical readers to question their own approach to reading and to question normativity in narratology and storytelling.

Katrina Scior takes a more sociological approach in the introduction to *Intellectual Disability and Stigma: Stepping Out From the Margins*. She writes that "for stigmatization to occur power must be exercised; that is, members of the stigmatized group are disempowered by having their access to rights, resources, and opportunities determined by those invested with more power in the social hierarchy" (5). The novel itself acts as a pseudo power that disempowers characters with disabilities as we see with Davis' look into the late nineteenth-century novel, as well as in *Flowers for Algernon* and *The Curious Incident*. Scior's book aligns with my idea that the sociological realm informs the literary realm, using real-world approaches to stigma by looking at politics and discussing real effects of stigma for those with disabilities. Chapter five has a discussion on stigma in mass media, which does not include literature. Newspapers, television, and films are the kinds of mass media discussed, but the same critiques about these forms of media are still relevant to literature. The main critique of mass media is the way disabilities are represented. One example mentions while televising the Special Olympics, commentators used ultra-positive language such as "inspiring" and "amazing" when describing the social aspects of the games rather than the competitors' abilities as competitive athletes (46). While this was meant to be positive and encouraging, it comes off as patronizing and ignores that these are actual athletes worthy of being taken

seriously. Other representations in media were not so positive, and as Rebecca Renwick explains,

In the absence of direct contact, such media messages are often the primary sources of individuals' experiences with people with intellectual disabilities.

Some of these representations include stigmatizing messages about people with disabilities. Unfortunately, audiences often presume that such representations have elements of truth about them that may outweigh personal experiences. (45)

This of course also applies to literature. If fiction brings stigma and stereotypes to its plot intentionally or unintentionally, it still leaves readers seeing that representation as true to all who possess the same disability, only further perpetuating real-world effects of stigma.

Flowers for Algernon and *The Curious Incident* are worth looking at in conjunction as both attempt to provide an innovative and nuanced narrative through the lens of their characters with disabilities, yet fall short. This is because the authors and readers share neurotypical perspectives. The normativity of the structure of the novel and genre scripts in conjunction with their limited scope in understanding disability only confirms readers' preconceived notions about what they already think they know about disability.

2. FLOWERS FOR ALGERNON

Flowers for Algernon exemplifies the way people with disabilities such as Charlie were treated in the 1960s with the use of medical intervention used to try and correct mental disabilities.¹ These medical interventions led many to end up in state institutions if they could not be cured of their disabilities. From Charlie's childhood into adulthood is the looming question of whether or not he should be placed in an institution for people like him. Before his surgery, Charlie is made fun of by his coworkers and we see in flashbacks of the past how other children and Charlie's family mistreated him as a child. He is treated, essentially, like a medical anomaly. Keyes uses the experimental surgery, Charlie's rapid growth of knowledge, and subsequent decline to critique society's need to fix people with disabilities. However, the hero's journey used to display this critique is misplaced in that the journey Charlie embarks on only confines him to his role as a character who cannot conform to neurotypical society; it does not dispel the stereotypes and stigma customary readers may have.

Charlie undergoes this surgical medical experiment in an attempt to reverse his mental disability. While it is never explicitly stated what Charlie's disability is until midway through the novel (phenylketonuria, which is a genetic disorder that affects the metabolization of enzymes), it is clear he has not developed much cognitively since

¹ See *Christmas in Purgatory: A Photographic Essay on Mental Retardation* (1966) by Burton Blatt and Fred Kaplan. This book is an essay derived of photos taken of people housed in state institutions for mental disabilities. This book exposed the harsh and neglectful treatment that these patients faced and gives an unflinching look at how institutions during this time were run.

childhood. His narration composed of journal entries is laden with incorrect spelling, grammar, and an overall misunderstanding of general subjects. After the surgery, his intellectual ability surpasses expectations and he becomes so smart that he is still an anomaly to his doctors and peers. Eventually, Charlie reverts to his prior mental state and he loses his intellectual ability. Keyes critiques society's need to "fix" individuals like Charlie by making him unable to conform to "normal" society. Once he becomes smart, his intellectual ability transforms from what we would consider "normal" to surpassing the knowledge of even his doctors who are involved with his surgery, which is just as alienating to the neurotypical characters and readers alike. Therefore, even though the novel may cause readers to question the most oppressive medical interventions to "fix" characters with a disability, it still reinforces the impossibility of relating to these characters because of the normative outlook neurotypical readers possess.

Flowers for Algernon begins with a quote from Plato's *The Republic* that emphasizes what we perceive as weakness in order to get readers thinking about Keyes's subsequent critique of the way we have medicalized disability using medicalization not only as a diagnostic tool, or as a means of treatment, but as a way to "get rid of" disability. The passage reads,

Any one who has common sense will remember that the bewilderments of the eyes are of two kinds, and arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light, which is true of the mind's eye, quite as much as of the bodily eye; and he who remembers this when he sees any one whose

vision is perplexed and weak, will not be too ready to laugh; he will first ask whether that soul of man has come out of the brighter life, and is unable to see because unaccustomed to the dark, or having turned from darkness to the day is dazzled by excess of light. And he will pity the other; or, if he have a mind to laugh at the soul which comes from below into the light, there will be more reason in this than in the laugh which greets him who returns from above out of the light into the den. (Preface)

Beginning with this passage lays significant groundwork for the story that unfolds. “The Parable of the Cave” is the backdrop of Charlie’s hero’s journey. As Donald Palumbo explains in his article “The Monomyth in Daniel Keyes's ‘Flowers for Algernon’: Keyes, Campbell and Plato,” this preface “indicates that Charlie's entire post-operative experience is to be read as a variation on the adventure of this parable’s protagonist” (434). This idea Plato proposes about the “bewilderment of the eyes” being caused by either going into the dark from light or turning to light from darkness alludes to exactly how Charlie’s story will unfold. This passage from “The Parable of the Cave” also makes clear that for one person to judge another person because of their “weak vision” should take caution and contemplate their own biases. This excerpt is Keyes’ way of explaining the story that is about to be revealed, but also forces the reader to question how we perceive weakness, as well as what we choose as weakness and what we decide is overcoming weakness.

In Donald Palumbo’s article, he notes that the timeline of the hero’s journey is that “the hero is called to an adventure, crosses the threshold to an unknown world to

endure tests and trials, and usually returns with a boon that benefits his fellows” (427). Of course, Charlie does not follow a physical journey but rather a mental one. In line with the hero’s journey, Charlie has an exceptional birth, but not exceptional in the typical sense since he is born with a disability. His disability forces his exile from being rejected by his family. Charlie’s “call to adventure” is the operation to increase his intellect and it is also his crossing of the threshold. Yet his journey differs significantly, in that Charlie re-crosses the threshold back to his old cognitive level by checking himself into the Warren home. Charlie is blinded by the light coming out of the cave and is again blinded by darkness by going back into the cave. Although Palumbo makes a strong case of how the novel falls in line with the hero’s journey, I argue that the script’s deviations away from the hero’s journey keep Charlie’s character pushed out of neurotypical society.

Delving straight into Charlie’s journey, not long after his postoperative surgery, there is one example where readers are left feeling uncomfortable with the way Charlie is treated by his peers, which reads:

We had a lot of fun at the bakery today. Joe Carp said hey look where Charlie had his operashun what did they do Charlie put some brains in. I was going to tell him about me getting smart but I remembered Prof Nemur said no. Then Frank Reilly said what did you do Charlie open a door the hard way. That made me laff. Their my frends and they really like me (22).

This is a rather difficult scene to read not long after Charlie's operation where he is still the same intellectually. He does not understand that the other boys at work are making

fun of him and he thinks they are laughing with him, not at him. Charlie cannot see yet how much he is missing until his intellectual ability begins to increase. The spelling and grammar are underdeveloped as this is a journal entry written by Charlie. Here, the reader may feel sympathetic for Charlie, yet because of the way the reader is still judging Charlie's intellect based on his spelling, grammar, and lack of awareness, it is difficult for the reader to embrace Charlie fully. The expectation here is that Charlie quickly and miraculously gets smarter. Even Charlie himself feels this way, expressing at times his frustration with his growing intellect taking more time than he anticipated. As neurotypical readers, Charlie becoming smarter immediately is what would make us feel comfortable as witnesses to Charlie's story as the person who overcame.² When this does not happen immediately, the reader is left to feel the unpleasantness that it is taking too long.

Another example is when Charlie is getting smarter and beginning to retain more information. This passage reads, "What a dope I am! I didn't even understand what she was talking about. I read the grammar book last night and it explains the whole thing. Then I saw it was the same way as Miss Kinnian was trying to tell me, but I didn't get it. I got up in the middle of the night and the whole thing straightened out in my mind"

² *Brilliant Imperfection: Grappling with Cure* (2017) by Eli Clare looks into the nuances of cure as it relates to disability, discussing how the medical industry's idea of cure can be useful but how it also can act as a means of oppression. The idea of the "person who overcame" is noted in an advertisement Clare discusses about dyslexia that reads, "Overcaem dyslexia," and then, "Hard work. Pass it on." Clare notes that this ad is demeaning for those who cannot simply "overcome" their disability and that the misspelling of the word "overcame" is a stereotypical means of portraying dyslexia. Neurotypical readers would appreciate a seemingly more inspiring ending to Charlie's story with this similar notion, yet this does not happen in the novel.

(39). Here, it is clear Charlie is improving. The grammar and spelling are better, and he is starting to make connections with learning and retaining new information. Charlie is growing intellectually and his improvements, as well as his awareness that he is getting smarter, is a more heartwarming scene that again, allows readers to feel better about Charlie as a person with a disability. To be smarter is to be "fixed," which translates to being normal. Readers begin to embrace Charlie here as normal but only because he is currently getting better. Once he becomes a genius, he is no longer normal and is just as alienated as he was before. Unlike the typical hero's journey, Charlie's journey does not just increase to a normal level of growth but exceeds growth beyond the normal range, which is why readers only feel further pushed away, rather than staying pulled into his character.

The story continues to deviate from the typical hero's journey script in that Charlie is always going back in his past remembering repressed memories from his childhood. As he moves forward with his growing intelligence, he continues to reach for the past to understand how his past impacts his current present. With Charlie's childhood memories coming to light, he remembers and now understands instances where he was being made fun of. He explains,

I think it's a good thing about finding out how everybody laughs at me. I thought about it a lot. It's because I'm so dumb and I don't even know when I'm doing something dumb. People think it's funny when a dumb person can't do things the same way they can. (43)

Here is when Charlie realizes his own difference in relation to his coworkers as well as everyday people he encounters who are neurotypical. In order for him to move forward, he constantly has to return to his past. His journey does not move progressively through time but jumps back and forth where readers feel sympathy for the abuse he endured as a child by his mother and more current abuse by his coworkers. With his ever-growing intellect, Charlie becomes more robotic and also takes on the role of a savant, as does Christopher in *The Curious Incident*.

As Charlie's intellect grows, so does the rift between him and the people he spends most of his time with. It begins with his coworkers at the bakery. Where beforehand they had fun making fun of Charlie for his disability, they now feel threatened by him because he is becoming smarter than they are. He says, "People at the bakery are changing. Not only ignoring me. I can feel the hostility" (67). His coworkers begin to resent him so much they end up convincing their boss, Mr. Donner, to fire him after Charlie figures out that one of his coworkers, Gimpy, has been stealing from Mr. Donner. They realize that their antics will not last as long as Charlie stays and continues to get smarter.

Charlie even begins to isolate himself from his former teacher, Alice Kinnian, whom he has grown fond of romantically. As Charlie's childhood memories come back to him, he finds solace in talking about them with Alice, but as he becomes smarter, she begins to feel his intelligence has turned him into a patronizing and self-absorbed person. She says,

‘Next to you I am rather dull-witted. Nowadays...I go home with the miserable feeling that I’m slow and dense about everything. I review things I’ve said, and come up with all the bright and witty things I should have said, and feel like kicking myself because I didn’t mention them when we were together.’ (123)

While Alice is the last person to have ever made Charlie feel bad about himself pre and post-surgery, she begins to feel the way Charlie used to when he did not understand even the most basic of information. She continues,

‘...I feel more and more stupid, and when you leave the apartment, I have to stare in the mirror and scream at myself: ‘No, you’re not growing duller every day! You’re not losing your intelligence! You’re not getting senile and dull-witted. It’s Charlie exploding forward so quickly that it makes you appear as if you’re slipping backwards.’ ...but whenever we meet and you tell me something and look at me in that impatient way, I know you’re laughing.’ (124).

Alice feels as though Charlie has shut her out of his life, however, her own insecurity about her no longer being as smart or smarter than Charlie is what makes her feel distant. At this moment Alice is the neurotypical reader. Alice reflects the fears that society has about being mentally disabled. It never occurs to her that Charlie does know how she feels because he has lived his life not understanding and being laughed at. In fact, Charlie has never thought of her as less than himself once he does become smart. We are meant to feel sorry for her at this moment and resent Charlie, but Alice is the one being insensitive here. With their quarrel, Charlie is alone and isolated again with no friends, confidants, or lovers.

Alice and his coworkers are not the only ones who begin to resent Charlie. A pivotal moment in the novel happens when Charlie goes with Professor Nemur, Dr. Strauss and the assistant, Burt, to a conference to reveal their experiment findings with Charlie. While at a party the night before the conference, Nemur takes his chance to shine, explaining to the other party-goers all about Charlie's disability and successful surgery. Charlie, however, has discovered a flaw in his research. Charlie discovers an article in the *Hindu Journal of Psychopathology* that debunks Nemur's research. Charlie interrupts Nemur's moment to bring up this article, which has not been translated into English yet. Obviously, Professor Nemur cannot read Hindu as Charlie can and because the article has not been translated yet, there was no way Professor Nemur could have known that there was a flaw in his research. Charlie taking over Nemur's moment to critique his research makes Nemur upset, so Strauss takes Charlie off to the side and tells Charlie, "You're making him feel inferior and he can't take it" (149). Charlie gets frustrated that the men he looked up to are not actually as smart as he thought. Charlie surpasses their own intelligence, meaning the people who helped him are now also threatened by him and want to isolate themselves from Charlie. Charlie becomes unlikable with his newfound intelligence and is no longer the underdog we root for during his journey of self-discovery but rather a spectacle we continue to critique for his ever-growing capacity for knowledge. This is a prime example of Goffman's theory on phantom normalcy and phantom acceptance. As much as Charlie tries to act "normally" and conform, he cannot, which means he cannot be fully accepted by anyone: not Alice, not his doctors, nor his coworkers.

This resentment for Charlie continues during the actual conference where Charlie is made out to be a circus freak with the way he is described by Professor Nemur. Nemur tells the audience of scholars, “‘When Charlie came to us he was outside of society, alone in a great city without friends or relatives to care about him, without the mental equipment to live a normal life. No past, no contact with the present, no hope for the future. It might be said that Charlie Gordon did not really exist before this experiment...’” (161). For Nemur to describe Charlie in this way, is not only his method to get back at Charlie for debunking his research in front of everyone at the party the night before but shows the true colors of how they and everyone view Charlie, as someone who has been created, who did not exist before the experiment. Charlie was an outsider before and he is an outsider now, a spectacle who still does not have family or friends, and now with his discovery, no hope for the future. Charlie is more of an outcast than he has ever been and being put on display at this conference only heightens this sensation even more.

In Sonya Freeman Loftis’ book *Imagining Autism*, she discusses Charlie’s role as savant and how this only further showcases Charlie as a social enigma. She writes,

The postoperative Charlie is not neurotypical - the experimental ‘cure’ seems to have transformed the young man with PKU into an autistic savant, complete with all of the Asperger’s stereotypes. The experiment moves Charlie from intellectual disability to social disability, embracing the stereotype that presents ‘excessive’ intelligence as a social problem. (73)

Before, Charlie could not conform to his world because of his lack of intelligence. Now that he has too much intelligence, he still cannot conform socially and we see this over and over again with the people he is closest to. He cannot act fully “normal” despite supposedly being cured. Freeman Loftis claims that Charlie’s new savant skills come at a price, that his new skills are a ‘compensation cure’ for his social disability (74). This “compensation cure” is simply a reward to gloss over Charlie being a social outcast which is exactly why Charlie cannot connect with anyone in his life.

After Charlie figures out that his intelligence will fade just as quickly as it grew, his mental disability becomes the villain of the novel as he desperately tries to find a way to save his intelligence. As Brent Walter Cline explains, “the primary enemy of this novel--that which would rob the reader of the existence of its hero--is the inevitable return of mental disability, which does not allow for all those characteristics that make the post-operative Charlie distinct” (*Disability Studies Quarterly*). With Charlie’s impending regression, Cline suggests that Charlie's narration takes on the rhetoric of death which in turn makes readers go from pitying Charlie before his surgery to fearing him just as his coworkers, Alice, and doctors do, back to feeling pity, seeing mental disability as a death sentence for Charlie. This death-centric rhetoric in Charlie’s narration does not dispel readers from fearing the stigma surrounding disability and only confirms their suspicions that to be disabled is to be less than.

With this in mind, the novel makes a return to the parable of the cave. Charlie quotes a passage that reads, “...the men of the cave would say of him that up he went and down he came without his eyes...” (285). Charlie quotes this after a therapy session

with Dr. Strauss that distresses Charlie and Dr. Strauss. Charlie envisions himself moving upward towards the outer crust of the earth. As he gets closer to piercing the “upper curtain of the mind” old Charlie begins to pull him down. This forces Charlie out of his stupor where the quote from Plato comes to mind (283). This is a struggle between the two Charlies of who will take over his body, even though we know old Charlie is who will prevail. Old Charlie will drag the new Charlie down to where he cannot reach his peak point of intelligence. Old Charlie left the darkness of the cave, new Charlie found the light until old Charlie dragged him back down into the cave where New Charlie’s eyes needed to readjust to the darkness. This last therapy session with Dr. Strauss is the ‘rebirth’ that the hero in the monomyth experiences. Charlie has a metaphorical rebirth during his hallucination in the session. Palumbo writes, “Charlie’s out-of-body experience, which is his ‘apotheosis,’ is to be seen as a microcosmic representation of his post-operative experience as a whole” (435). Yet, to argue against Palumbo’s point, Charlie never reaches full enlightenment as the old Charlie drags him down before he can get there, making Charlie a false hero.

With Charlie turning away from the light and regressing back to his old self, we see a change in his writing. His grammar and spelling begin to get worse. Alice, who he had reconciled with for a time, agrees to not visit him after he tells her he does not want to see her anymore. He stops attending his therapy sessions and going to the lab to see Professor Nemur and Dr. Strauss. He returns to his old job at the bakery only to quit after a newer employee, Klaus, ridicules him. Gimpy tells Charlie, “...if anyone bothers you or tries to take advantage of you call me or Joe or Frank and we will set him

straight. We all want you to remember that you got frends here and dont you ever forget it. I said thanks Gimpy. That made me feel good. Its good to have frends....” (309). And just that quickly, Charlie forgot that his “frends” also made fun of him in this way and resented him when he was smart but now they stick up for him. Charlie is no longer a threat to the status quo now that he is no longer smart. After showing up to Alice’s class, where he was previously a student with other people with disabilities, he decides to check himself into the Warren Home School because his presence in her room only confirmed his regression back to his old ways and makes her burst into tears. He remembers that he was smart once and explains, “I dont want Miss Kinnian to feel sorry for me. I know everybody feels sorry for me at the bakery and I dont want that eather so Im going someplace where they are a lot of other pepul like me and nobody cares that Charlie Gordon was once a genus and now he cant even reed a book or rite good” (309). Charlie knows the only way he can make everyone comfortable is to go to the Warren Home with peers who are like him. His decision to reside at the Warren home allows neurotypical readers to breathe a sigh of relief as Charlie will be shielded away from the “real” world. It allows them to feel comfortable knowing that they will no longer be forced to interact with Charlie as a disabled character and upholds the notion that people with disabilities are better off being segregated from normal society.

Charlie’s return to the Warren home, is not the typical journey home readers would expect out of a hero’s journey. It is more of a defeat than a triumphant end. Palumbo explains the option to return or not from the journey are both viable endings for a hero’s journey. Charlie does not want to return but he has no choice in the matter.

Palumbo explains, “As he desperately does not want to regress to his original level of cognition, Charlie’s last-ditch research effort in the field of human intelligence is his refusal to return, even though nothing he can do will prevent it” (442). Palumbo’s claim is unfair because Charlie is forced to return to his prior pre-journey self. Charlie, like many people with disabilities, is not afforded the luxury of making that autonomous decision because he literally is incapable of doing so. Charlie is a failed hero, especially when his character comes up against the genre script because it displays his incapability to navigate the ordinary world.

3. *THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME*

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time (2003) is written much later than *Flowers for Algernon* (1966) but bears similar flaws regarding its use of genre script in its attempt to create an authentic portrayal of its protagonist, Christopher. Whereas *Flowers* uses more of a medical interventionist approach to Charlie's disability, *The Curious Incident* uses more social approaches like talk therapy for Christopher as a means to encourage him to be less socially awkward. Despite these differences in historical treatment and perception of each character, by reading these two novels together we can see how both Charlie and Christopher are stigmatized because of the genre scripts they are held to.

Early in the novel, we learn Christopher is an adolescent with autism who is trying to figure out who killed his neighbor's dog, Wellington. He later uncovers a secret about his mother, who died not long ago. While following the mystery novel script, Christopher's misunderstanding of the world leads to a more contrived story that perpetuates the stereotypes of people with autism as being blind towards social situations, figurative language, and having a strictly technical view of the world. An example of a deviation of script occurs at the beginning of the novel when Christopher discovers his neighbor's dog, Wellington, killed via a gardening fork. His neighbor, Mrs. Shears, finds him with her dog and calls the police, believing Christopher to be the culprit. Christopher becomes uncomfortable by the cop and Mrs. Shears not listening to his assertion that he only found Wellington and did not kill him. The passage reads:

I rolled back onto the lawn and pressed my forehead to the ground again and made the noise that Father calls groaning. I make this noise when there is too much information coming into my head from the outside world. It is like when you are upset and you hold the radio against your ear and you tune it halfway between two stations so that all you get is white noise and then you turn the volume right up so you know you are safe because you cannot hear anything else. The policeman took my arm and lifted me onto my feet. I didn't like him touching me like this. And this is when I hit him (8).

If following the typical genre script, readers would assume Christopher to be the detective, not the suspect. This is an instance where this deviation from the script is key. It displays Christopher's rational, internal thoughts as compared to his reactive, instinctual behavior. Christopher clearly explains his rationale for how he handles uncomfortable situations. He even recognizes the external judgment he receives from his father (the groaning noise). This external judgement from his father gets internalized by Christopher as a negative trait. For Christopher, the groaning noise is a useful coping mechanism, but to his father, it is an unnecessary annoyance. Christopher's recognition of his father's judgement is a moment where phantom normalcy and phantom acceptance get shattered because in this scene, Christopher physically cannot act "normally." Christopher's tone quickly changes from intellectual and insightful to matter of fact when describing hitting the police officer. Just like his reactionary response of hitting the cop with no rational thought behind it, his narration follows suit; there is no intellectual engagement, only fact. Christopher's understanding does not align with

reader expectations, as a typical reader would not respond to a false accusation with this type of behavior. While the passage may pull the reader in with sympathy, as we know Christopher is innocent, his narration simultaneously pushes the average reader away because of his non-typical behavior towards Mrs. Shears and the police officer.

In Heather Laine Talley's review of the novel, she argues that the novel falls short of promoting self-reflexivity in its readers. She points out that the novel "offers the illusion of experiencing Asperger's disorder from the inside out" (236). She claims that this illusion comes with ramifications that hinder cultural representations of disability. She notes that the novel reads as an "objective, detailed report" written in the style of an "ethnographer aspiring after Truth or a young man with Asperger's disorder" (238). As Talley suggests here, Haddon's ethnographic style of writing only gives two separate options: aspiring for Truth (the true experience of autism), or just an adolescent with Asperger's (Christopher's flat characterization), not both because the writing makes "no attempt to reveal the visceral experience of the person actually experiencing the event" (238). Readers get a basic sense of Christopher as a character with Asperger's but there is no real depth as to what this true experience encompasses because his ethnographic narration makes his character and story flat. The cold, unfeeling narration Christopher adopts for the novel does not reach the Truth of the experience of having Aspergers but only reaches Christopher on the surface level as a character making him and his experience contrived. His cold narration is present in this very scene with the police officer. His narration is always matter of fact and honest, always sticking with the

mundane details, leaving neurotypical readers to take Christopher's narration at face value, never questioning anything further from his character or his experiences.

The novel does not encourage the reader to self-reflect which is present even before this instance with the police officer. Christopher explains how he cannot read emotion, explaining that when he was seven his therapist Siobhan showed him a picture of a frowning face and he "knew that it meant sad" and that she then showed him a picture of a smiley face and he "knew that it meant happy." But when Siobhan showed him other pictures that expressed a range of less obvious emotions, Christopher had trouble deciphering what was being portrayed. Christopher writes that he "got Siobhan to draw lots of these faces and then write down next to them exactly what they meant" and that he kept the paper when he "didn't understand what someone was saying" but that it "was very difficult to decide which of the diagrams was most like the face they were making because people's faces move very quickly" (3). This insight matches the common stereotype that people with autism cannot understand nor feel emotion. However, if we are to believe Christopher does not understand emotions based on his narration, then we, as neurotypical readers, never question this stereotype. A similar sort of confusion is present with the police officer. The police officer does not match Christopher's notion of how a police officer is supposed to behave. Instead of the police officer being a person of trust and safety, he is condescending and accusatory, which makes Christopher seem as though he is incapable of handling the situation.

We also see how this interaction between Christopher and the police officer upholds the idea that people who have autism have a strictly technical view of the world.

An example of this is when the police officer asks Christopher how old he is and Christopher replies with “I am 15 years and 3 months and 2 days” (6). In this instance, it is clear Christopher sees everything technically and answers accordingly. The policeman later asks Christopher why he was holding Wellington to which Christopher explains, “This was a difficult question. It was something I wanted to do. I like dogs. It made me sad to see that the dog was dead. I like policemen too, and I wanted to answer the question properly, but the policeman did not give me enough time to work out the correct answer,” so he simply answers with, “I like dogs” (7). While all of the information Christopher gives the police officer is true, it does not help in making Christopher look less guilty. He answers the policeman’s questions truthfully and in a technical manner but with no explanation, which is why the cop continues to press further. This ends up making Christopher uncomfortable, he later responds to this discomfort by hitting the officer.

We see Christopher’s continued misunderstanding of the situation once his father arrives at the police station to pick him up. While being interrogated at the police station by a different police officer, Christopher is asked if he killed Wellington, to which Christopher replies no. The police officer asks Christopher if he is telling the truth to which Christopher replies, “Yes. I always tell the truth” (18). This is yet another convention that Haddon perpetuates of people with autism because along with Christopher’s misunderstanding of the nuances of language, he can only think in technical terms. This means he will always tell the truth because he is always technical and practical and literally cannot tell lies because it does not fall in line with

Christopher's robotic view of the world. This inability to lie gets Christopher in potential trouble again when the policeman implies Christopher did not mean to hit the police officer in an attempt to understand why Christopher assaulted the policeman at the crime scene. Christopher says, "But it wasn't an accident" (18). And Christopher is correct. His hitting the policeman was not an accident but a reactionary response to the police officer touching him. The policeman doing the questioning lets Christopher off with a warning, but it never dawns on Christopher how this could have gotten him into further trouble because although it is true, it makes Christopher look guilty.

Christopher addresses his own inability to lie in the next chapter, explaining, "I don't tell lies. Mother used to say that this was because I was a good person. But it is not because I am a good person. It is because I can't tell lies" (19). Lying is troubling to Christopher because as he states, "... there is only ever one thing which happened at a particular time and a particular place. And there are an infinite number of things which didn't happen at that time and that place. And if I think about something which didn't happen I start thinking about all the other things which didn't happen" (19). Lies encompass too many nonexistent outcomes for Christopher that are overwhelming for him to think about because there are so many possibilities when thinking about things that "didn't happen." This makes telling the truth a more pragmatic option for him even if as seen with the police officer, it gets him into trouble because with the truth there is only one outcome. Christopher's discovery of Wellington and subsequent run-in with the police prompts him to play detective and solve the mystery of who killed Wellington by emulating Sherlock Holmes. In *Imagining Autism*, Sonya Loftis Freeman states, "For

Christopher, the detective figure represents an opportunity for a positive re-reading of his inability to intuit other people's emotions," citing Nicola Allen (126). While Christopher looks up to Sherlock Holmes for the similarities they possess, Christopher comes off as "a humorous parody of the autistic detective tradition," and that Haddon "encourages the implied neurotypical reader to view Christopher condescendingly" (127). Despite Christopher's similarities to Sherlock like being hyper-focused, having a long attention span, and using reason over emotion, Christopher fails at being a detective figure because the reader's knowledge surpasses Christopher's regarding the mystery plot. Loftis Freeman posits that Christopher pursues the 'wrong' mystery, leading neurotypical readers to view his attempt at being a detective with "detached (and potentially condescending) humor" (128). Christopher's blunders as a detective occur because of his perceived weaknesses that hinder him from deciphering the real mystery which is not about Wellington but about his mother. Loftis-Freeman's discussion of Christopher as a failed detective directly corresponds with Bhaktin's discussion of the trope of "not knowing." Christopher encompasses this trope but cannot know what neurotypical readers do because of his autism, giving readers an unfair advantage, and making Christopher a parody of the detective figure.

As Christopher stumbles along, trying to figure out who killed Wellington, readers are introduced to some stereotypical quirks that Christopher professes to have. Christopher explains a "Good Day" versus a "Black Day." Christopher explains that seeing four red cars in a row on his way to school makes it a "Good Day," three red cars a "Quite Good Day," and five red cars a "Super Good Day" and seeing four yellow cars

in a row makes it a “Black Day” (24). While previous examples have displayed Christopher’s more logical approach to understanding the world, basing his good days and bad days off of chance seems irrational. Christopher explains that the school psychologist, Mr. Jeavons, asks him about this to which Christopher says he likes “things to be in a nice order. And one way of things being in a nice order was to be logical. Especially if those things were numbers or an argument. But there were other ways of putting things in a nice order. And that was why I had Good Days and Black Days” (24). “Good Days” and “Black Days” are Christopher’s way of controlling the world he cannot conform to or have control over. Logic and numbers are controllable; factors outside of this are not, so Christopher must create order where there is none. This obsessive need to create an order and routine for himself is how he copes in a world that does not cater to Christopher’s needs as a person with autism. It is also important to note that unlike in *Flowers for Algernon* where there is an attempt to medically reverse Charlie’s disability, in *The Curious Incident*, there are professionals who work with Christopher to help him overcome some of his challenges, rather than trying to erase them altogether. There is more of an attempt made to understand Christopher’s quirks, which is noble, but the fact that he needs to see the psychologist or the therapist, Siobhan, still is medicalizing his disability in a way that complicates their effort to be more helpful than the medical industry would have been in the past as with *Flowers for Algernon*.

This leads us into another change in the typical genre script where Christopher’s neighbor, Mrs. Alexander tells him a family secret that Christopher was unaware of; that

his mother, before she died, had an affair with Mr. Shears. This new fact not only gives Christopher more leads on why someone may have killed Wellington, but it also opens up a new investigation of sorts about Christopher's mother. Christopher tells his readers that "sometimes a mystery isn't a mystery" (100). He gives an example of a pond at his school that has frogs in it, and that sometimes there are more frogs in the pond than other times and that it may be associated with a cold winter or a heron which ate some of the frogs, but that it is really simple math. He gives a math formula that can be used to figure out the population of the frogs,

$$N_{new} = \lambda (N_{old})(1 - N_{old}) \quad (101)$$

This is the equation Christopher uses to figure out the population of the frogs.

Christopher credits this discovery to Robert May, George Oster, and Jim Yorke and says that all this means is that "sometimes things are so complicated that it is impossible to predict what they are going to do next, but they are only obeying really simple rules" (102). This is Christopher's roundabout way to explain that not everything is as mysterious as it seems and foreshadows a jarring event for Christopher, that his mother is not dead. Christopher comes to this realization when he finds letters his mother has written to him, which his father has hidden away. His novel now changes from a mystery about who killed Wellington, to a mystery about where his mother is and why his father lied to him about her death.

With Christopher's population formula as one example of his intelligence, comes the stereotype of the person with autism being a savant. Christopher can explain complicated math equations, but, as Talley suggests, cannot really grasp the social

world. Christopher must put everything in the context of a math equation or some other scientific fact in order to relate it to the real world. Neurotypical readers understand what has happened: that Christopher's mother has run off with Mr. Shears. Christopher however, because of his perceived lack of awareness of this situation, cannot immediately understand this situation altogether and it takes some time for him to fully understand what has happened. What Christopher sees as a "normal" way to situate his understanding of the world is quite abnormal to general readers. Christopher's unique way of processing this difficult information keeps him out of the realm of normalcy: he still is not totally embraced by neurotypical readers. His father then admits that he lied about Christopher's mother's death because that was easier to cope with than the fact that she left, and he also admits to killing Wellington.

The stereotypes that showcase Christopher's need to forecast his day based on chance as a means of control or taking on the role of savant are a part of why it takes Christopher so long to figure out the truth about his mother. These stereotypes act as roadblocks that force the genre script to navigate in a way that only serves the neurotypical perspective and way of reading. Because Christopher encompasses many stereotypes in addition to the ones discussed here, is why, as Freeman Loftis suggests previously, readers are always a step ahead of Christopher. Haddon's narration of Christopher becomes what hinders the novel from keeping in line with the set genre of the detective novel. With the realization that Christopher's mother is alive, the story shifts from detective novel to a coming of age story.

Now that the genre script has shifted by Christopher learning that his own father killed Wellington in a vengeful moment due to an argument with Mrs. Shears, Christopher becomes fearful and skeptical of his father for the remainder of the novel. What is quite disturbing in this moment of truth scene is that Christopher's father tries to justify killing Wellington by saying, "Christopher, when that red mist comes down...Christ, you know how it is. I mean, we're not that different me and you" (122). This is a vast injustice when we compare the killing of Wellington to that of Christopher hitting the police officer at the beginning of the novel. This moment highlights even further the initial moment that the script changes from its typical form when Christopher goes from detective to suspect in the eyes of the cop. It is not fair for Christopher's father to put his vengeful anger in the same realm as Christopher's discomfort by the policeman. His father's anger is controllable no matter how blinding his rage made him feel and his intention was to hurt Mrs. Shears. Christopher had no intention of hurting the policeman and that is the stark difference in the two scenarios. This moment allows readers to equate Christopher's wrongdoing with his father's and the two are incomparable because of the nature of each incident.

Once he leaves for London, Christopher becomes the person with autism who overcame. He leaves without telling his father, navigates the train station, and wanders around London all alone. Christopher faces his fears like having to hold onto his ticket which is partially yellow, his least favorite color and does not let it ruin his mission as he does when he sees four yellow cars in a row and has a "Black Day." He also manages to overcome his fear of speaking to strangers at the train station when he needs help on

where to purchase a ticket and overall, dealing with crowds of people in the station and on the train. He says, “There were lots of people on the train, and I didn’t like that, because I don’t like lots of people I don’t know and I hate it even more if I am stuck in a room with lots of people I don’t know, and a train is like a room and you can’t get out of it when moving” (158). He also manages to unintentionally outsmart a police officer who rides on the train with him and wants to bring him back to his father. After going to the restroom on the train, Christopher finds a storage shelf that holds luggage and hides in there because it makes him feel safe, stating, “it was dark and there was no one in there with me and I couldn’t hear people talking, so I felt much calmer and it was nice” (163). Christopher uses his atypical coping mechanisms to get through his journey to London. Once arriving at the London station he returns to his “groaning noise” to block out the sound of all the people at the train station, which we see at the beginning of the novel with his interaction with the police officer who thinks Christopher killed Wellington. Christopher’s odd behaviors become his strength in that they help him continue his journey to find his mother.

Once Christopher does find his mother in London, he recalls a dream he had where all of the neurotypical people die because of a virus where, “people catch it because of the meaning of something an infected person says and the meaning of what they do with their face when they say it, which means that people can get it from watching an infected person on television” (198). This virus allows for the world to only be left with “special people” like Christopher which he loves because no one talks to him, touches him or asks him questions (199). This is an interesting moment as it takes

the stereotype of people with autism not understanding emotion and makes emotions the downfall of society. It also creates a world where people like Christopher are the norm. Only in his dream can he be fully accepted and be of a “new normal” that allows him to be freely himself in the world, unlike his real-world within the novel.

During the remainder of the novel, Christopher and his mother return to his father’s house, his mother gets her own apartment not far from his father, and she breaks up with Mr. Shears. Once they arrive home from London, Christopher is only concerned with taking his A-level maths exam. It is as if nothing that he experienced before this moment matters, because the focus turns to this math exam. However, he does reconcile with his father. Christopher does not have a grand reunion with his mother, or his father for that matter. He is rather cold towards the entire situation and this moment that typically would be the climax of the novel, Christopher reuniting with his mother, is quite emotionless on Christopher’s end. The novel ends with Christopher passing his math exam and knowing he can do anything because as he says, “I went to London on my own, and because I solved the mystery of Who Killed Wellington? and I found my mother and I was brave and I wrote a book and that means I can do anything” (221). While these are all moments that helped Christopher grow, it is too tidy of an ending that enables neurotypical readers to feel as though the only way they can connect with someone with autism is if that person tries to conform to the conventional world and overcomes their own barriers.

Christopher’s story never does conform to a script because he cannot and does not conform to the neurotypical world he is a part of, yet is the person who overcomes

by being able to do all these things. With the novel switching genre scripts, it highlights the reader's continued alienation from Christopher. Our own inability to adjust to the change in script, we continue to widen the gap between Christopher and ourselves because we are uncomfortable with the changes. It is reflective of our own discomfort with a character like Christopher; we are unsure of how to interact or how to handle such a situation and instead of examining our own biases, we blame Christopher because it is easier to see the one who is different as being the problem rather than ourselves.

4. CONCLUSION

Flowers for Algernon and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* are important not just in the world of literature but in disability studies in that they both feature main characters with disabilities that are central to the understanding of each story, yet also are problematic in how they keep Christopher and Charlie confined to worlds where they cannot conform. With this, readers with normative expectations can only understand Christopher and Charlie's experiences as far as the scripts and the narration take them. By examining these two texts with their genre script conventions and connecting this with our readerly expectations, shows how the sociology of the characters are interpreted by the readers and how this affects our understanding of the way disabilities are being represented. To examine these two texts together using Goffman and Herman's theories will hopefully give people who do not have disabilities a better understanding of why they are so bothered by disability when they see it in literature, film, and daily life. This in turn can help them address their preconceived notions about what it means to be disabled and the stigma surrounding disability. To recognize and examine the stigma of these texts enables neurotypicals to address them in daily life and can hopefully break down a barrier that allows people who are not disabled to see disability as just a form of difference and not a form of distress. In the future, I would like to see more neurotypical narratives that break the genre conventions that Charlie and Christopher's characterizations are confined to. Perhaps people who do not have disabilities becoming more aware of their discomfort and inability to fully

understand the disabled experience, can at least, try to acknowledge these limitations and try to create a more honest experience. To create this experience, we need not change the character but change our own attitudes. By letting the character come first and his disability second, allowing him to lead his own story, no matter how messy, uncomfortable, and unconventional, is perhaps the best way forward for the future of disability in fiction.

REFERENCES

- Bakhtin, M. M. *The Dialogic Imagination : Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*. Edited by Michael Holquist ; Translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. University of Texas Press, 1988.
- Blatt, Burton, Fred Kaplan. *Christmas in Purgatory: A Photographic Essay on Mental Retardation*. Human Policy Press, Syracuse, NY, 1974.
- Clare, Eli. *Brilliant Imperfection : Grappling with Cure*. Eli Clare. Duke University Press, 2017.
- Cline, Brent Walter. “‘You’re Not the Same Kind of Human Being’: The Evolution of Pity to Horror in Daniel Keyes’s *Flowers for Algernon*.” *Disability Studies Quarterly*, vol. 32, no. 4, 2012.
- Goffman, Erving. *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*. Reissue edition, Touchstone, 1986.
- Haddon, Mark. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Vintage Contemporaries, 2004.
- Herman, David. *Story Logic : Problems and Possibilities of Narrative*. University of Nebraska Press, 2002.
- Keyes, Daniel. *Flowers for Algernon* (1966). First edition, Mariner Books, 2005.
- Loftis, Sonya Freeman. *Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum*. Indiana University Press, 2015.
- Scior, Katrina, and Shirli Werner. *Intellectual Disability and Stigma : Stepping Out From the Margins*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

Talley, Heather Laine. "Review Essay: The Curious Incident of Disability in the Night-Time." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 34, no. 2, Apr. 2005, pp. 235–245.

Works Consulted

Campbell, Fiona Kumari. *Contours of Ableism : The Production of Disability and Aabledness*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Hall, Alice. *Literature and Disability*. 1 edition, Routledge, 2016.