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# **Patterning Worry in Narrative, Gender and the Domestic Sphere in Mark Haddon's *A Spot of Bother* and *The Red House***

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## **Abstract**

This thesis argues for the significance of worry in Mark Haddon's *A Spot of Bother* (2006) and *The Red House* (2012). All of Haddon's novels can be said to be a study of the human consciousness, containing a variety of worried characters, but it is notable that worry is most predominantly present in the two novels that centre around complex family dynamics. For this reason, these two novels will be the focus of the analysis. The thesis contains a background chapter which traces the etymology of worry, locates the incipience of worry in literature during the Modernist period, and places worry in the framework of gender theory. The text analysis starts with a focus on worry in relation to possibility through a methodological examination of the novels using Mieke Bal's narratological theory. Next, the worry that is present in the text is contextualised in a gendered framework, in which it is argued that a correlation exists between the represented worry in the novels to the boundaries of gender and the family as a gendered construction. The findings of the thesis are that the way a narrative is constructed is influential in the way worry is both present and represented in a literary text. The contextualisation of worry with a gender perspective explores the idea that the object of worry and the way characters respond to worry is largely determined by notions of femininity and masculinity, both in an individual sense and through the expectations of the way mothers, fathers, sons and daughters are expected to behave.

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## Introduction

Worry is a notable connecting motif throughout all of Mark Haddon's written work, but it has not generally been noted or commented on. As Roland Barthes once asked, 'is everything in narrative significant, and if not [...] what is the significance of this insignificance?' (141). The lack of critical response in regard to the representation of worry in literature suggests that worry is insignificant, yet worrying in itself is, as Haddon wrote 'part of the human condition' (*The Red House* 185). Haddon's work focuses on the ordinary subject (*Garbett* 1) who he consistently portrays as a worrier. Thus, the question arises: what is the significance of worry in Haddon's texts?

In Haddon's second and third novel, *A Spot of Bother* (2006) and *The Red House* (2012) respectively, worry seems to occur far more frequently than in his other works. In *A Spot of Bother* (*SoB*), the word "worry" or a derivative of the word is used 61 times in 512 pages<sup>1</sup>, and in *The Red House* (*RH*), the word (or a derivative) occurs 29 times in 340 pages. Worry can also exist without the actual word being uttered; the existence of a problem in a text can reach far beyond the literal expression of an issue. However, the frequency of the word points to the prominent presence of the feeling being experienced, because the narrative will only allude to worry when characters are either worried themselves or sense that another character is worried.

This thesis examines the gravity of worry in these two novels through two hypotheses. The first hypothesis is the significance of worry on a formal level: *SOB* and *RH* are character-driven stories, which suggests that worry has an impact on the narratological structure of the texts. The second hypothesis is the significance of worry on a socio-cultural level: worry can arrive through the instable nature of femininity and masculinity. The object of worry seems to be determined through gender boundaries, and the way worry is responded to is similarly affected by gender norms. The represented worry seems to centre around questions of what if: what if X happens if another character finds out about this, what if one character confronts another character, and what if I do not appear masculine/feminine enough doing XYZ?

Having established this, a few ideas need to be noted. First, worry as a phenomenon can be uttered literally and can also be found in the subtext. Moreover, a person can feel anxious without

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<sup>1</sup> For the sake of a consistent appearance of the frequency of «worry» in the novels, I have provided the page numbers of the novels' editions in the same format. The edition of *A Spot of Bother* used in this thesis is a hardcover version which counts 390 pages.

suffering from an anxiety disorder; Francis O’Gorman described worrying as ‘not readily a visual, but a peculiarly verbal form of anxiety’ (1,006). For these reasons, it can be established that when “worry” occurs literally in a text, the function is to verbalise feelings of anxiety. For the sake of clarity – and because most of the narrative of the novels takes place in reported thought and thus portrays worry as it emerges and is experienced – I will group the intertwined concepts of worry and anxiety as being part of the same process, which I will refer to as worrying.

Second, “worry” and “anxiety” are often used interchangeably, but the discernible difference is that worry is not classified in the chart of mental disorders of the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-V), whereas anxiety is. Anxiety is defined as ‘the anticipation of future threat’ (American Psychiatric Association 189). According to the DSM-V, anxiety or general anxiety disorder ‘differ[s] from developmentally normative fear or anxiety by being excessive or persisting beyond developmentally appropriate periods’ (American Psychiatric Association 189). Anxiety as a disorder is therefore the experience of the feeling of worry taking precedence over the actual object of the worry. Moreover, anxiety focuses on ‘future *threat*’, whereas the focus in this thesis lies in worry that is related to contemplating possibilities. Worry, thus, does not have an immediate relation to a bad possible outcome that triggers fear but rather implores all possible outcomes, good and bad.

This thesis argues that worry is created when an event or experience causes destabilisation and opens a variety of (future) possibilities. Worry, as it is represented in the texts, is a contemplation of possibility that arrives through change or challenge. The first part of the thesis focuses on the narratological structure and its relationship to the representation of worry through a narratological analysis with the use of Mieke Bal’s theory. The focus of the discussion is the causal relationship between worry and possibility. The objective of the analysis of narrative is to demonstrate the connection between the primary themes of the novels and their connection to worry. The connection consequently reveals the influence that worry has in the progression of the story.

The second part of the thesis focuses on the causal relationship of worry and stability through a gendered perspective of the family. This section focuses on the socially constructed boundaries that make up gender and their influences on the experience of worry. The domestic sphere can be regarded as an extension of gendered expectations, in creating and perpetuating gendered patterns as well as fulfilling roles associated with specific genders. Worry, in this part of

the thesis, is centralised to demonstrate that the object of one's worries is dictated by the boundaries of gender in the context of individual femininity and masculinity as well as in the family sphere.

## ‘There Was No Use Worrying About That Now’

### The Development and Contextualisation of Worry in Literature and Gender Theory

To fully understand and explore the influence and importance of worry in a literary text, worry must be defined. I will first trace the etymology of the word ‘worry’ to explore its significance and relate the concept of worrying to literature. Next, I will look at how the changing definition of the word also marks the emergence of worry and how it is represented in literature. I suggest that during the Modernist period, worry became an overtly represented concept in narratives through Modernism’s ‘aesthetic of self-conscious interiority’ (Olson 3).

The emergence of worry in literary texts coincides with the representation of “ordinary” aspects of daily life in literature, a concept Liesl Olson explores in *Modernism and the Ordinary* (2009). Modernism, moreover, explores themes that are also found within *SoB* and *RH* such as alienation, the perception of time, fragmentation, and ineffective communication. These themes, I suggest, are fundamental to the worries of the characters. Lastly, I will discuss gender theory to establish the idea that worry is a result of new possibilities related to a disruption of perpetuated acts. The discussion contextualises worry and presupposes that worrying shares a causal relation to gender norms.

Worry, as a noun defined by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), has two definitions. The first definition is ‘a troubled state of mind arising from the frets and cares of life; harassing anxiety or solicitude’ (OED). The second definition is ‘an instance or case of this; a cause of, or matter for, anxiety’ (OED). As I have briefly established in my introduction, the difference between worry and anxiety as a classified disorder lies in the emphasis of the object; worrying focuses on a problem or something bothersome, whereas anxiety as a psychological disorder focuses on the act of worrying itself over a longer period of time.

A straightforward way to consider the written history of worrying is to trace the etymology of the concept. The word ‘worry’, according to the OED, first appeared circa 725: the archaic spelling of worry was ‘wyrgan’, which means ‘to strangle’. Both the spelling and the meaning of the word show traces from Germanic languages such as Dutch (wurgen) and German (würgen). The primary definition of worry was originally ‘to kill (a person or animal) by compressing the throat; to strangle’ (OED).

From 1556 to 1898, ‘worry’ maintained the meaning of ‘to harass by rough or severe

treatment, by repeated aggression or attack; to assail with hostile or menacing speech' (OED). Worry, in Shakespeare's time, still carried the meaning of harming others, specifically in an animalistic, primal sense, which is in line with the historic origin and development of the word. It is interesting to note that the word 'worry' only exists in a single Shakespeare play, however (O'Gorman, *Worrying* 28). In *Richard III* (1592-1593) Queen Margaret speaks the lines: 'That dog, that had his teeth before his eyes, / To worry lambs and lap their gentle blood' (4:4:48-50). In contrast with the current definition of the word, worry originally denoted a sense of physicality: the meaning of the word has shifted from the literality of choking to a metaphor that compares an emotional state to the feeling of "being strangled" or "feeling choked".

Worry as a verb only came to mean 'to cause distress of mind to; to afflict with mental trouble or agitation; to make anxious and ill at ease; chiefly of a cause or circumstance' (OED) by 1822. In the following decade, the definition was developed to mean 'to give way to anxiety or mental disquietude' and was also adapted into colloquialisms such as 'I should worry' and 'not to worry' (OED). By 1863, the definition evolved into 'denoting a state of mind' (OED) and the word started being used in this manner in texts about day-to-day life, such as Henry George's *Progress and Poverty: An Inquiry into the Cause of Industrial Depressions and of Increase of Want with Increase of Wealth: The Remedy* (1879), in which he states that 'Men would no more worry about finding employment than they worry about finding air to breathe' (414).

The shift of the meaning of "worry" to an experience rather than an action is mirrored in the literary shift towards realism. It can then be argued that "worry" gained the definition that still stands today at roughly the same time as the rise in popularity of Sigmund Freud's theories regarding consciousness. Freud's theories also had a significant influence on the literary sphere (*The Norton Anthology of English Literature* 1,683). Modernists such as Woolf and Eliot felt that a realistic text was most aptly achieved through an exploration of individual experience and consciousness rather than through traditionally constructed stories (*Norton Anthology* 1,686).

Liesl Olson argues that, 'The novel, as a new form, moved toward representing a kind of idiosyncratic individualism, away from the universals and ideals of classical literature' (17). The aim of realism in literature was to emphasise individual experiences; worry is inevitably a part of that. To create narratives that involved idiosyncratic individuals, literature started to include mundane aspects of life, 'including an accurate depiction of time and intimacy with the texture of physical experience' (Olson 17). Worry, less overtly, for example, can be examined in the



character of Dorothea Brooke in *Middlemarch*. Dorothea's hesitation to enter a relationship with Will Ladislaw after Casaubon has passed away can be said to be derived from the worry about judgment of others. In the end, Dorothea is shown to overcome these worries by deciding to live a life that is regarded as socially a step down and she is shown to thrive despite this. The way worry is represented is thus dependent on the literary traditions of the time of production: 'the public values of the Victorian novel, in which major crises of plot could be shown through changes in the social or financial marital status of the chief characters, gave way to more personally conceived notions of value, dependent on the novelists' own intuitions and sensibilities rather than on public agreement' (*Norton Anthology* 1,688). Worry as a central theme in narratives, however, did not fully flourish until the Modernist period.

Modernism originated as a literary movement that focused on presenting the spiritual instead of the literal, such as in T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (*Norton Anthology* 1,685). Up until the nineteenth and early twentieth century, stoicism was a dominant ideal in British literature: 'the determination to stand for human dignity by enduring bravely, with a stiff upper lip, whatever fate may bring' (*NA* 1,684). However, by the ending of Queen Victoria's reign, the commencement of the first world war and the newly drawn attention to the subject of metaphysics and its importance, 'there were many manifestations of the weakening of traditional stabilities' (*NA* 1,683). The sense of instability experienced in the early twentieth century was expressed through fragmented narratives, both in the structure of the story and stylistically. Fragmented narratives also mimicked the newly introduced notion that time 'was a continuous flow in the consciousness of the individual' (*NA* 1,688).

Fragmentation is incidentally a technique that is employed by Haddon to illustrate the alienation between the characters in *RH*. Alienation in this sense of isolation is also enhanced by the focus on the consciousness in literary texts:

Concentration on the stream of consciousness and on the association of ideas within the individual consciousness led inevitably to stress on the essential loneliness of the individual. For all consciousnesses are unique and isolated, and if this unique, private world is the real world in which we live, if the public values to which we must pay lip service in the social world are not the real values that give meaning to our personalities, then we are all condemned to live in the prison of our own incommunicable consciousness. [...] The public gestures imposed on us by society never correspond to our inward needs. They are conventional in the bad sense, mechanical, imposing a crude standardisation on the infinite subtlety of experience. (*NA* 1,689)

It can thus be said that Modernism's focus on the individual consciousness and the new awareness of individuality introduced the theme of worry into literature. The 'concentration on the stream of consciousness' led to highlighting new issues of individual differences that lead to feelings of isolation. Alienation is a source for worry in both texts, as it creates uncertainty in the pattern of expectations of those who surround a person.

The changed meaning of worry as an internal process rather than an external act during the nineteenth century is echoed in the literary shift where an exploration of individualism and the consciousness surpassed traditionally structured narratives led by chronology. Modernists were still striving for realism but aimed to achieve a more accurate version of realism than their literary predecessors. According to Virginia Woolf, writers who did not focus on the "inner life" were 'content to deal with externals and did not go on to explore those aspects of consciousness, our true inward life, in which human reality resides' (NA 1,688). In *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (1957), Eric Auerbach argues that Virginia Woolf's work portrays a 'more genuine, a deeper, and indeed a more real reality through the oscillation of interior and exterior points of view, a movement that is symptomatic of the conditions of modern life' (477).

Modernist narratives moved away from a strong presence of a narrator to 'render inner perception' (Olson 1). *The Norton Anthology* states that in the twentieth century, 'The revival of interest in metaphysical wit brought with it a desire on the part of some pioneering poets to introduce into their poetry a much higher degree of intellectual complexity' (NA 1,686). This intellectual complexity consisted of intertextual references and existential ponderings amongst other things.

A more emphasised focus on the individual and the interior in literature also means a shift in the depiction of everyday life, of banality and the mundane, because 'prosaic events constitute the bulk of one's experiences and are thus crucial to literary representations that aim at realism' (Olson 63). O'Gorman argues that 'modernism's cultural ambition incorporated mundane mental trouble, and the fretful inner life of the anxious human being even in some of its most celebrated canonical texts' ('Modernism, T.S. Eliot and 'The Age of Worry'' 1,008). The literary focus on the mundanity of everyday life is important because it offers a framework for the choices one has. The role of intertextuality in Modernist texts also acknowledges the timelessness and non-uniqueness – in other words, the repetitions – of these worries.

Woolf and Eliot employ worry as a theme in very different ways. Woolf plays with the

notion of life existing between being and non-being: she is fascinated with matters that usually do not receive attention. Eliot, on the other hand, dwells on the superficiality of the worries one has and focuses on the higher spirituality of the meaning of life.

As is pointed out in Woolf's *Night and Day* (1919), writing is the 'perpetual effort to understand one's own feeling' (32), of which I would argue worry is an important part. Olson argues that 'for many literary modernists, the ordinary possesses particular values at various times, including the values of stability, efficiency, and comfort' (5). If narratives about the everyday deal highlight the value of comfort, then narratives about the everyday will also reveal moments of discomfort, since psychological research in worry, as it is experienced in the everyday, has established a correlation between feelings of discomfort and worry (Kelly 147), and this is echoed in narratives that are concerned with stability. Moreover, worry is derived from feelings of possibility through the experience of instability. Worry focuses on the "what if" of both the past and future. Because of modernism's focus on the everyday and the modernist characteristics of creating literary worlds through inner perspectives, worry inadvertently became a part of the literary narrative.

There is actually a connection between Haddon and Woolf in that Haddon notes how Woolf's depiction of the mind demonstrates 'the experience all of us have of being a single human mind with all our prejudices and blind spots and distortions, yet this being the only point of view from which we can observe the universe' (Haddon 'The Right Words in the Right Order', 85-86). All of Haddon's characters that I discuss struggle with a distorted sense of reality, and on one occasion in *SoB*, the narrator overtly imitates Woolf's stylistic use of stream of consciousness. The chapter in which Woolf's stream of consciousness is mimicked is out of place with the rest of the novel's syntax and emphasises just how skewed the character's perception of reality is in that moment.

The ordinariness of one's surroundings plays a vital part in Woolf's prose: 'Woolf bridges this divide [between interiority and realism] [...] by replicating the way in which individuals do the things they always do – repeated acts and habits – because these actions are the fabric of what she calls "character"' (Olson 59). Woolf's work depicts characters through everyday acts that usually do not garner interest because they are not heightened experiences per se; yet 'routine and habit, enacted by linguistic repetition, become more important than heightened or chronologically ordered events' (Olson 6-7). Moreover, the idea that "character" (or identity) is made up out of

repeated acts and habits in everyday life is based on the same premise as Butler's theory of gender performativity, which I will return to later.

Woolf's fascination with the ordinary has a revelatory purpose: 'Behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we – I mean all human beings – are connected with' (Woolf 72). I would argue that worry is part of the ordinary and is also part of the makeup of "the cotton wool" of everyday life. I also believe that worry is almost always present in a narrative as a part of the 'hidden pattern' to which Woolf refers.

The way Woolf uses the passing of time in her novels emphasises the hidden patterns. *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) takes place over the course of one day, and non-heightened experiences that would usually not garner any attention in a narrative due to their habitual, repetitive nature are highlighted. Worry now becomes the focus of attention because of the space it can be given in a narrative due to the new way time is represented. Worry is part of the ordinary, which 'consists of activities and things that are most frequently characterized by our inattention to them [...] unheroic events and overlooked things, neither crucial moments of plot development nor temporal points that signify accomplishment' (Olson 6).

T.S. Eliot's poetry arguably focuses on the superficiality of the matters that people worry about in modernity. O'Gorman claims that 'T.S. Eliot recognized, and helped define, worry as an admixture of the ordinary, and from ordinariness as from worry he searched our higher understandings of choice, and dramas of human salvation' ('The Age of Worry' 1017). The worry that surrounds possibility is a focal point in Eliot's work. In 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' (1915), the phrase 'there will be time' is repeated five times, and Prufrock states that there will be 'time yet for a hundred indecisions' (32), a statement which points to the circular and endless nature of worry. The constant worry about details he cannot determine is in fact one of the characterising aspects of J. Alfred Prufrock.

The structure of 'Love Song' reflects Prufrock's struggle with selfhood, as Prufrock's emotions and awareness are contrasted with the outside world (Dickey 123). Moreover, the 'progression [of grammar in the poem] tells the story of a missed opportunity that is nowhere explicitly narrated but constitutes the action of the poem' (Dickey 123). Whereas Woolf's prose relies on the textual exploration of habitual acts and non-heightened moments to highlight the 'cotton wool' in daily life, Eliot thus uses the formal aspects of the poem to reveal recurring patterns, and the repetition of these patterns is reflected in the syntax. For example, the line 'to

prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet' (Eliot 27) defamiliarises tenuous social interaction by using fragmentation of the body (focusing on the face rather than the entire person). The line reveals the performative aspect of characters which is derived from a concern about having to appear a certain way. The habituality is reflected in the repetition.

Amidst these repetitions, the speaker of the poem asks himself, 'Do I Dare/Disturb the Universe' (45-46). Not only does the poem play with worry as a theme for direction, the speaker also shows an awareness of the reliance of the entire universe on these habitual, repetitious patterns. In 'Burnt Norton' (1936), the speaker of the poem defies the "what if" by saying that 'what might have been is an abstraction / remaining a perpetual possibility / only in the world of speculation' (Eliot 6-9). Worry is part of a pattern of repetitions itself, which is reflected in the rhetoric in Eliot's poems.

Both Olson and Abramson discuss the occurrence of 'shock' and its relevance to twentieth-century narrative. Abramson states that the relevance of shock is due to the modern landscape that exists because of high-paced technological changes and makes for the distractions of urban life. She further argues that 'shock shapes the quintessentially modernist aesthetic of fragmentation' (39). Shock serves as a disruptor in day-to-day life and uncovers patterns that usually go unnoticed (Olson 64). The notion of "shock" that disturbs patterns is echoed in Prufrock wondering about 'disturb[ing] the universe' (46). In a similar manner, Woolf constructs her narrative to consist of 'substantial parts of the day that are not lived consciously' (Olson 9), which creates a contrast to the moment that the protagonist experiences shock or epiphany (a "disturbance of their universe"). Through the contrast between heightened and non-heightened experience, Woolf highlights the habitual patterns of daily life. Instances of shock cause worry, yet worry offers a buffer against the impact of shock because worry makes one imagine future possibilities.

The notion that gender is unstable can be displayed as instances of 'shock' that reveal hidden patterns of behaviour. The changing notion of what gender constitutes likewise influences the rigid boundaries of the gendered family institutions. Narratives that include ordinariness as their backdrop can serve to expose these hidden patterns of gendered behaviour because they expose the habituality, and thus reveal the instability of gender. Olson refers to Woolf's 'A Sketch of the Past', in which she argues that 'repetition of everyday actions is what we use to orient and control our lives, relying on the sameness of what has gone before. Though we might not be aware of it [...] we are protected by change, comfortable in the "cotton wool of daily life" (Olson 66).

Thus, Haddon's backdrop of an ordinary British landscape detailing the story of "ordinary" people can reveal patterns of behaviour. Gender, Judith Butler asserts, relies on these exact patterns. The notion that gender relies on patterns presupposes that gender as such is not stable but rather a perpetuation of everyday acts in the frame of femininity and masculinity.

As Butler argues in *Undoing Gender* (2004), 'we need norms in order to live [...] and to know in what direction to transform our social worlds' (206). When these norms are experienced as unstable, worry arises from the notion that masculinity and femininity need to be reinstated through conforming behaviour. Rather than looking at how gender performativity operates on the level of political discourse and power relations in society, I want to analyse the impact of behaviour restricted by gender boundaries on an individual level in Haddon's texts.

The limitations of the cultural concept of femininity and the consequent repression have often been explored in feminist theory. However, I would argue against the idea introduced by Monique Wittig and Simone de Beauvoir that 'only women have a gender, men being exempted from such mark of specificity in so far as they represent the human' (Braidotti 269). As Solomon-Godeau states, 'the visibility of masculinity itself' points to 'a destabilisation of the notion of masculinity such that it forfeits [...] its taken-for-grantedness, its normalcy' (70). The destabilisation of gender leads to internal destabilisation; the first part of the thesis explores worry in relation to possibility, and the second part focuses on worry's relation to stability.

The idea that 'masculinity, like femininity [...] bears only an adventitious relation to biological sex and [the] various manifestations collectively constitute the cultural, social, and psychological expression of gender' (Solomon-Godeau 71) serves as a foundation for the gender discussion in this thesis. Behaviour that is culturally perceived as "feminine" or "masculine" is socially attributed, rather than biologically instinctive. If both masculinity and femininity are constructs, male *and* female characters have the potential to struggle with these "assigned" roles.

According to Judith Butler, gender is a fabrication of internal prohibitive law that is inscribed upon the body. Seen in this way, gender is a way for society to create limits and boundaries to individual desires and their resulting human actions (*Gender Trouble* 173). Worry is thus determined by the rigid boundaries of gender, as the concept of gender makes a distinction between men and women and the supposed desires that are attached to the two categories. The options of desire are limited by gender; the possibilities that a person can explore when he or she is worried about future events are also dictated by gender. In addition, the details we worry about

and the way one worries about them has consequences for the way we act upon those details. An intricate link thus seems to exist between worry and the norms of gender.

Gender boundaries are not in themselves a repression of certain desires, but rather exist ‘to compel [people] to signify the prohibitive law as their very essence, style, and necessity. [...] in effect, the law is at once fully manifest and fully latent, for it never appears as external to the bodies it subjects and subjectivates’ (171). Norms are experienced as an internal form of judgment that seems to be based upon instinct but, in actuality, are to a great extent dictated by the barriers of gender. The concept of gender as performative defies the idea that feminine and masculine behaviour is derived from the essence of the sex instead. Butler suggests that gender is a ‘heterosexual construction’ of desires, and thus works as a disciplinary force within society to keep its subjects to adhering to a norm (172). Gender performativity, which according to Butler acts in favour of the heterosexual norms in society, is perpetuated through repetitious acts, gestures, and desires, and works through a system of exclusions and absence (173). As will be discussed further on, the characters in *SoB* and *RH* are worried about deviating from social norms, a fact which suggests that their gender expression, too, is reliant upon traditional notions of femininity and masculinity.

The notion that gender performativity is dependent upon the repetition of acts also brings with it ‘the possibility of failure’ (*Gender Trouble* 179). Once this failure is experienced, which I believe happens in Haddon’s texts, ‘the abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional *discontinuity*, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this “ground”’ (179). For gender to become an essence of identity, it constantly needs to be reinforced and perpetuated – something that becomes apparent when characters feel the need to reinstate their manliness, or comment upon acts in relation to one’s gender. For example, in *RH*, Dominic thinks about ‘how odd [it was] that it was such a manly profession now’ (161) whilst he is cooking. By emphasising that cooking is now “manly”, Dominic reinstates his masculinity, but the fact that he feels the need to do so also suggests that he is worried that he might not appear masculine because he is conducting a traditionally feminine task.

The fact that acts are repeated makes them appear natural. Butler argues that ‘[...] the extent that the “I” is secured by its sexed position, this “I” and its “position” can be secured only by being repeatedly assumed, whereby “assumption” is not a singular act or event, but, rather, an iterable

practice' (*Bodies that Matter* 108) to maintain the impression that gender is static and natural. The repetition of acts without disturbance, which makes the impression that gender is indeed naturally attached to identity, takes away the possibility of instability. In other words, if gender is not challenged or experienced as something one is insecure about, one does not have to worry about reinstating it.

The idea that gender is a form of cultivated behaviour relying on repetition serves as the framework for the contextualisation of worries in the primary texts. I believe that it is precisely the repetitive performance of gender that makes this theory so fruitful for fictional narratives; fictional stories that detail "ordinary" characters in an "ordinary setting" can demonstrate how the naturalised acts of repetition are merely a pattern to which one adheres rather than a static concept. Butler states that 'repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony' (177). Even though Butler refers more to the general sense of domestication, I believe that 'domesticated', in this case, can be taken in the most literal sense of the word. The family as a cultivated institution is already gendered, and the different roles in a family carry with them an expectational framework of gendered behaviour. The rigorous patterns of gendered behaviour are simultaneously perpetuated through the family setting. By using worry as an indexical tool, I will analyse how gendered repetitious acts influences Haddon's narratives of families and how the performative level of gender is brought on through and perpetuated by familial relations.



### **Possibility: Worry and Narrative**

An exploration of the narratological structure of *SoB* and *RH* is the starting point of understanding and explaining why worry is such a prominent feature in Mark Haddon's second and third novel. The aim of this thesis is not a metatheoretical discussion about narrative but a demonstration of how the theory of narratology is a useful tool to dissect the occurrence of worry in these texts. For this reason, I have chosen to limit my methodology to Mieke Bal's *Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (1985/1997) to examine the prevalence of worry. Mieke Bal discusses narratology through three different concepts: that of the narrative text; that of the story; and that of the fabula. The narrative text signifies 'a text in which an agent or subject conveys a story to an addressee' (Bal 5); the story is the content of what is being told; and the fabula signifies the sequence of events as they occur in the narrative text.

The worry in Haddon's two novels is a by-product of the overarching motifs and themes of the story. A narratological discussion demonstrates how these themes are represented and, and how they, to various degrees, cause worry. In *SoB* and *RH*, the experience of worry manifests itself primarily through the themes of alienation, through a lack of communication, and through the perspective. In addition, the worries in the texts can be divided into four categories: behavioural patterns, nurture and care, feeling unstable through external change or challenge, and normativity. These themes and categories are interdependent through their links to possibility, which is what creates the presence of worry.

The paratexts of both novels points to the employment of worry as represented in the text. Both titles predicate the perspective scale of the worries and themes that are discussed, and when analysed, prove to be predicates for the way the themes of alienation and perspective are employed within the novels. *A Spot of Bother* is self-contained in that the worries are presented within related issues that happen to the main characters in the story, the Hall family. 'A spot of bother' is a phrase directly taken from the novel itself, and typifies worry as a mild inconvenience with no great significance. The phrase, moreover, puts semantic focus on the object of perspective, which is an overarching cause for worrying in the narrative. The worries for each character occupy the entire story and in this way, the worries are portrayed as disproportionately important. Thus, the title affirms that the worries that occur within the narrative text are related to the issue of putting problems into perspective. However, all the worries are resolved by the end of the novel, proving in the end that they were nothing but 'a spot of bother'.

The relationship between the exterior and the interior is also established by the title of the novel; the exterior in *SoB* is locally delineated. The novel starts with George Hall, age 57, who finds a lesion on his thigh, which convinces him that he is dying from cancer. It is this lesion that (after he has attempted to surgically remove it himself) is later referred to as ‘a spot of bother’ (266). In this case, George projects his abstract worries about dying on a physical object. Moreover, the relationship between mind and body in *SoB* is what causes all of the characters to be alienated from one another. George’s occupation with the supposed cancer causes him to mentally isolate himself from his family life. The relationship between surroundings and character is not very prominent in *SoB*. There is very little indication of an existing relationship between the descriptors of space and descriptors of emotional states or themes.

*The Red House* on the other hand thematically links the exterior landscape to the interior landscape and the characters in the narrative. Rather than alluding to an event or theme within the text, the title in this case simply states the setting of the fabula. However, the interconnectedness between exterior and interior is stated from the second paragraph of the novel onwards. The repetitiveness of worry is mimicked in *RH* in the descriptors of the setting, something which creates a relational connection between the exterior setting and the interior landscape. The emphasis on the consciousness being part of a larger whole is depicted by the reflection of emotion on the outside surroundings.

The setting thus has a prominent place in the narrative because it mimics the interior landscape of the characters. This relationship between exterior and interior is established in one of the first descriptions of the countryside as ‘the land buckled and rucked. *A sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused* [sic]’ (21). Bal argues that ‘descriptors consist of a theme (e.g. house) and subthemes (e.g. door, roof, room) [...] a metaphor can replace the theme or accompany it’ (46); in this case, the metaphor is the anthropomorphised descriptions that cause an interfusion between external and internal landscape. The constant, repetitious passages that describe the house and surroundings serve to enhance the theme of ‘a sense sublime of something far more deeply interfused’. *A Spot of Bother*, which is set in the familiar space of the Hall family home, has fewer detailed descriptions of the surroundings, which suggests that there is less significance in the relationship between space, story, and characters.

Repetition in *RH* is frequently used to describe what is happening in the surroundings: ‘Angela [was] hypnotised by the power lines as they sagged and were scooped up by the next

gantry, over and over and over' (3). For Angela, the repetition and patterns of the outside world are enchanting; they 'hypnotise' (3) her and temporarily distract her from the upcoming event. The holiday cottage which the title refers to forms a spatial opposition to the siblings Angela and Richard's individual homes and can therefore "act" as a neutral ground. However, the image of the red house gains prominence in the narrative through descriptions such as: 'You run your hand along the bumpy, magnolia wall. Paint over paint over plaster over stone. [...] something alive in the fabric of the house' (43). *The Red House* places emphasis on context through its interpolation of intertextual passages and through the spatial relevance to the interior landscape of the characters. The emphasis of the reflection on outside objects causes the characters' minds to be alienated from the physicality of their bodies. The mind, rather, is connected to the physicality of the surroundings instead.

Worry, as it is represented in these two novels, is shown to be of repetitive nature. Repetition is present in the recurrence of the objects of the worries throughout the narratives as well as through the lingering questions of "what if". Repetition also enhances the relationship between consciousness and surroundings in the above passage regarding the house. The 'aliveness' of the house is derived from the habituation of people, and the description of the house can therefore be placed in the theme of being part of a human history, thus creating a relation to the passing of time. By stating that the house is 'alive', the novel further emphasises the existence of a relationship between a space and its inhabitants. The emphasis on human history can serve as a distraction for the present.

Questions of past, present and future and the fluidity of time are a recurring theme in the novel and are linked to the act of worrying: 'time was not a series of chronological moments to be represented [...] but a continuous flow in the consciousness of the individual, with the "already" continuously merging into anticipation' (*Norton Anthology* 1,688). The passage from *RH* makes a generalised remark on how the past can influence the present quite literally – paint is placed over older paint thus covering it up, yet the old paint still exists. Not only does the old paint still exist, but it contributes to the feeling that the house is 'alive' in the present day. The same notion of the past influencing the present is vital in worrying about the "what ifs" – the house, thus, can be read as a metonymy for the mind. The house has a paradoxical role within the text; it is supposed to act as a neutral ground but is continuously described as being alive and having a past, which makes it the opposite of neutral.

Moreover, the way the house is described also seems to reflect the characters' positions in relation to one another in a wider perspective: 'Behind everything there is a house. Behind everything there is always a house, compared to which every other house is larger or colder or more luxurious' (12). This statement marks the non-uniqueness through repetitions and diction such as 'always'. Furthermore, there is a comparison drawn to 'other houses', which can be read as a substitution for other people; the other houses will always be better or worse. However, houses are opaque objects. One can never be sure about what goes on inside. If the passage is interpreted in this manner, the space serves as an allegory for the enigma of minds outside of the characters' own.

The seemingly minor observation of the relation between the consciousness and the body creates a juxtaposition in the way worry is experienced. Worry in *RH* is approached as metaphysical, whereas *SoB* emphasises the physical. The body represents the exterior landscape that is linked to the interior landscape in *SoB*. Worries are linked to objects in *RH*, but the body is established as being separated from the consciousness through observations such as 'how bizarre that your hand was part of your body [...] You could imagine it having a mind of its own and strangling you at night' (19). The connotation and meaning of mental problems are placed upon outside surroundings.

In her theory of narratology, Bal offers a structured analysis of the fabula in a narrative through a categorisation of the different types of events. She uses the theories of Aristotle and Bremond on how 'three phases can be distinguished in every fabula: the possibility (or virtuality), the event (or realization), and the result (or conclusion)' (Bal 196). Both of the primary texts discussed here are narrated primarily through thought report, which in this case causes most of the narrative not to take place in the motion of action, but in a state of contemplation.

Thus, the narratives seem to put the focus on the possibility phase in the three phases of fabula, rather than on the phases of realisation or result. The moments that the actual "outer world" events climax (which is the realisation of the possibility in narratological methodology) only cover a small part of the fabula. In other words, effect and affect take precedence over confrontation and interaction between the characters. A hierarchy is then created in the importance of the phases of fabula in Haddon's two novels: possibility first, followed by result, and lastly event. Worry is placed in the foreground because the fabula remains primarily in the first phase of possibility, where the focus lies on the "what ifs".

The implication that the fabula places emphasis on possibility does not mean that the narrative does not transition in its phases. However, the hierarchy causes worry to have a significance in the direction that these phases take and it therefore inadvertently has consequences for the phases of realisation and result. Worry can be said to exist in all three phases, but its level of dominance is dependent on the phase the narrative is in.

It could be said that internal worry (i.e. not verbally expressed) exists in the phase of possibility. The phase of possibility is then mostly stuck in circular, repetitive thoughts signified by words that imply uncertainty such as “maybe”, “if”, and “perhaps”, rather than by the word itself: ‘Maybe if he’d been better at staying in touch. Maybe if he’d eaten a little more date-and-walnut cake. If he’d invited her and Jacob over more often. If he’d lent her money ...’ (*SoB* 64); ‘Those scary thoughts you got sometimes. What if I were someone else? What if I never reached the world?’ (*RH* 314). The phase of possibility can be said to be a phase of contemplation that primarily takes place in the mind, and therefore temporarily evades any form of confrontation. Words such as “if” and “maybe” are often repeated in an ongoing sequence of sentences that mimic the circular thought process that typifies worrying about the implication of action and outcome.

The uttering of the word “worry” can consequently be argued to lie in the narratological phase of realisation. Realisation is, in these narratives, quite often the phase where the thoughts that are a result of the worries are turned into a ‘verbal form of anxiety’ (O’Gorman 1,006). The circular thoughts of possibility are then gathered and grouped in the verbal expression of worry in intelligible sentences. For example, worry is literally uttered only when Jamie thinks that ‘there was no use worrying about that now’ (*SoB* 77). Even though the word worry has been absent until this point, worry itself is still implied to have been present before. The realisation of the cause of George’s affected behaviour is explained through the term “worry”: ‘[George] says he’s worried about dying,’ said mum, in a stage whisper’ (*SoB* 149). The fact that the narrative typifies Jean’s speech through ‘stage whisper’, apart from the colloquial meaning of the expression, also highlights a performative aspect of voicing worry. In other words, sometimes “worry” is merely uttered in an expectational framework of social etiquette – Jean, as a wife, *should* be worried about her husband.

The word “worry”, then, can be said to be employed when the character mentally realises that he or she should be worried. The word occurs, for example, when Jean realises she should be worried the moment something more “serious” seems to be going on with George; ‘Could we step

outside for a moment?’ [Doctor Parris] said it so politely that it never occurred to [Jean] to be worried’ (*SoB* 216). Examples from *RH* show similar occurrences. For example, when the narrator states that ‘[Daisy] tries to worry about Richard but can’t do it’ (*RH* 238), it shows Daisy’s moment of realisation about her relationship to her uncle. The result of Daisy’s inability to worry about Richard is not stated but merely implied. This thought thus lies (and remains) in the phase of realisation. By way of contrast, when Louisa is confronted with problems in her marriage with Richard, she states ‘*I worry that you might have married the wrong person [sic]*’ (*RH* 255); uttering these doubts (a realisation) means that the narrative can move on to the phase of result.

The phase of result is where “worry” is only present when the result in question leads to new possibilities. The phase of result can transition back to the phase of possibility when the conclusive event is left open ended to a degree. In *SoB*, for example, there is an implication of a more deeply rooted problem when George – briefly – does not recognise his future son-in-law; ‘[George] seemed to have forgotten who Ray was, and this was worrying, too’ (20). The realisation that George has forgotten Ray leads to the narrative phase of result where the narrator implies that George’s moment of oblivion has worrying implications (and thus leading the narrative phase to return to that of possibility). In addition, in *RH*, after Angela has told Louisa that she still feels affected by a miscarriage from nearly two decades ago, Louisa says that she is ‘*worried about Angela [sic]*’ (277). The result of their confrontation opens a new possibility, which worries Louisa because she is concerned about how Angela will process the emotions about her miscarriage.

The dominance of the phase of possibility concurrently enhances the theme of alienation, which is a dominant one in both novels. A consequence of the fabula lingering in the phase of possibility is that there is hardly any confrontation between two actors that would move the phase of possibility onto the next phases of realisation and result. Confrontation in the two novels happens mostly in dialogue, and as I will discuss later in this chapter, miscommunication or a lack of communication occur with great frequency in both stories. If effective communication rarely happens or is not given much space in the narrative text, then this inhibits the series of events to successfully move onto its sequence of realisation and result without leading to new possibilities.

The emphasis on the phase of possibility is established early in both novels. *A Spot of Bother* overtly starts with the incipience of a possibility – the first two words of the novel are ‘*It began*’ (1, emphasis added). ‘It’ refers to George Hall’s worry that the lesion on his thigh is cancer and that he is dying. The line continues ‘... when George was trying on a black suit [...] the week

before Bob Green's funeral' (1), thus establishing the exact event that triggered the 'it'. George's worry about dying is caused by the death of an old colleague. However, George's worries are centred around the object of death itself, rather than as a part of a grieving process. George commits the act of removing the lesion with a pair of scissors midway through the narrative, an action which can be classified as both the phase of realisation (he can cut the cancer away) and result (he is now cured of non-existing cancer). This act of self-mutilation because of something which is merely eczema implies that George's troubles are mental and not physical, which creates the transition of the phase of result back to the phase of possibility again because it asks the question of what has triggered George's mental instability.

The ending of *SoB* functions as a resolution to the first line of the narrative. The second to last line of the novel is George's realisation that 'It was time to stop all this nonsense' (390). The novel starts with the incipience of a worry and ends the moment the worry is "solved". George's worries begin during an act of banality (trying on a suit), and the end of his worries are marked by another banal act. The novel finishes with the line 'He turned the page and stood up to find a corkscrew' (390). The insignificance of the act of standing 'up to find a corkscrew' (390) marks a return to "ordinary life" for George.

However, this mundane act reveals nothing about the possible outcome of George's decision to 'stop all this', which implies that the narrative finishes in the phase of realisation or what modernists call 'shock' (when the protagonist experiences an epiphany about his or her current situation) (Olson 8). As Olson argues, 'ordinary life becomes the context in which epiphany is subsumed, reconsidered and assessed in light of its continuity or its ability to actually change one's previous behaviour' (8). Because of the novel's abrupt ending, which takes place in the moment of 'shock', the novel still finishes in a space of possibility because the moment of realisation is not completed with a result phase.

The phase of possibility in *RH* can be argued to start with the novel's overarching event, which is the holiday to which Richard has invited his sister Angela in the wake of their mother's funeral. The narrator states that '[Dominic] had no idea what to say. Angela and Richard had spent no more than an afternoon in each other's company over the last fifteen years and their meeting at the funeral seemed perfunctory at best' (4). The dynamics of the two families spending a week together is thus established as potentially unpredictable – meaning that there are several directions that the series of events can take – which initiates the phase of possibility for the upcoming

sequence of events.

Mieke Bal argues that ‘The initial situation in a fabula will always be a state of deficiency in which one or more actors want to introduce changes’ (Bal 199). The starting point of a narrative is then, theoretically, always a moment of instability through the introduction of a change. Yet, Bal’s hypothesis does not necessarily argue that every single narrative has such an overt presence of worry as is the case with the texts discussed here. The presence of the worry in Haddon’s novels can be said to be derived from the fact that the stories of *SoB* and *RH* are not so much focused on the actual result of the change that will take place but on the change itself. The focal point of the narrative is the phase of possibility; therefore, the fabula is mostly focused on the stage where these changes are set in motion.

The story of *SoB* is self-contained in the sense that every phase of possibility is initiated from moments of realisations or results of events present in the actual text; the only primary change that is created outside of the narrative is George’s recent retirement. However, the state of deficiency can be argued to originate in the very first sentence of the novel (‘it began’ (3)). The worries in *SoB*, thus, do not reach much further outside of the narrative in the way that the worries in *RH* do. The phase of possibility in *RH* is set up by an earlier event that happened outside of the narrative text; the death of the mother of two estranged siblings. The death of Richard and Angela’s mother is what causes the “state of deficiency”, and this event is what leads Richard to plan a holiday with his sister and both of their families to rekindle their relationship.

Barthes argues that in a narrative text a distinction can be made between functional events and non-functional events. Functional events, Barthes argues, ‘open a choice between two possibilities, realise this choice, or reveal the results of such a choice’ (Bal 191). The fabula in *SoB* is overtly dictated by a chronological sequence of functional events: the “state of deficiency” at the start of the narrative is George’s newly triggered worries about death. The additional members of the Hall family are introduced through sequential functional events: the daughter Katie’s wedding announcement; the son Jamie’s break-up with his boyfriend Tony due to quarrels about the wedding invitation; George witnessing his wife Jean having an affair with David Symmonds, causing further mental destabilisation; George cutting away the lesion on his thigh and ending up in the hospital; the wedding of Katie and Ray being cancelled and then re-established; the confrontation between David and George at Katie’s wedding; and finally, George’s realisation that ‘It was time to stop all this nonsense’ (390).



The sequential ordering of the primary texts also determines how or why worry occurs and locates its point of origin. Because the story of *SoB* is chronologically ordered, and the story is led by sequential functional events that are presented within the physical text, the worries in this novel are contained within these boundaries. The sequential ordering of *RH* initially suggests a chronological ordering of the story: the fabula is distinguished by a sequential ordering of the novel's chapters. The novel is divided into seven parts, which detail the seven consecutive days the chief characters spend in a cottage together. The narrative structure – which is bound by chronology rather than functional events – causes the represented worries not to be tied to the boundaries of the narrative text. Worries become more fluid because of the chronology of the narrative does not require an incipient point or a resolution to all the worries that are represented in the text.

Both novels employ retroversion (or flashbacks), albeit in different ways, which are dictated by the narrative structure. Mieke Bal's theory divides retroversion into two groups: external analepsis and internal analepsis. *A Spot of Bother* primarily applies internal analepsis, in which the retroversion lies within the primary fabula. *The Red House* contains mostly external analepsis, which is when the retroversion lies outside of the primary fabula. Retroversion in *SoB* is mostly contained to events within the narrative or has a direct correlation to events within the narrative, whereas *The Red House* contains retroversion that spans back to various points in time with no obvious correlation to the present moment in the novel.

Bal explains that 'external retroversions generally provide indications about the antecedents, the past of the actors concerned, in so far as the past can be relevant for the interpretation of events' (Bal 89). External retroversion is used in the form of memories, which is, according to Mieke Bal, 'the joint between time and space' (151). The use of memories is part of *RH*'s fragmentation of time; though the narrative structure is linear, but the story is largely set in the past through memories. Bal states that 'memory is an act of "vision" of the past but, as an act, situated in the present of the memory' (150). In this sense, memories are related to worry because they cause the characters to linger on the potential outcomes of the future had things gone differently in the past.

*The Red House* extensively explores the concept of time in its non-standardised form. Time in its historical sense is explored through the interpolation of intertextual passages, and time in the individual sense is explored through memories and personal pasts. *The Red House* thus causes a

sense of defamiliarisation by framing the narrative through a standardised time structure while the narrative itself focuses on the fluidity of time. The juxtaposition between form and content is ‘to upset habitual modes of perception’ (4), which further enhances the perception of the skewed perspective of the individual characters. The contradictory time sequence versus the personal perception of time furthermore refers to Modernist ideas of ‘exploring in depth into consciousness and memory rather than proceeding lengthwise along the dimension of time’ (*The Norton Anthology* 1,688). *The Red House* employs time as a constant flow rather than a ‘series of separate moments’ (*Norton Anthology* 1,688). The contradictory sequential form of *RH* versus the primary plot has implications for the meaning of the story. As Bal argues,

Playing with the sequential ordering is not just a literary convention; it is also a means of *drawing attention to certain things*, to emphasize, to bring about aesthetic or *psychological effects*, to show *various interpretations of an event*, to indicate the subtle difference between *expectation and realization*, and much else besides. (81, emphasis added)

The defamiliarisation of time perception through the emphasis on experience stresses the centrality on the consciousness rather than on circumstantial events in the novel.

Both novels have a third person omniscient narration, or in Mieke Bal’s terminology, external narration with character focalisation. The narrative perspective is an additional element that causes the dominance of the phase of possibility. The characters would technically have to be in the phase of realisation before being able to report their thoughts in the narrative if the novel was narrated from a first-person perspective. The external narration of *SoB* and *RH*, then, can convey ‘a range of mental activities at different levels of consciousness, including reflective thought, perceptions and states of mind’ (Rundquist 160). The different levels of consciousness are precisely the contemplations and feelings of anxiety and worry that are part of the phase of possibility that the characters are not able to evaluate; the external narration allows for pre-evaluated report of thought.

Both novels also address the problem of being able to put issues into perspective. An external narrator can emphasise this issue because, as Mieke Bal suggests, ‘a narrator that tells about others and a narrator that tells about himself [...] entails a difference in the narrative rhetoric of “truth”’ (21). The “truths”, or rather deviations from the actuality of the situation, are derived from the order in which the same events are told from different perspectives, the lack of commentary, the use of hyperboles in the focalisation, and the narrative ordering of thoughts. The external narrator in both primary texts serves to add an objective “truthful” voice, which can show

the clouded judgment characters may have as a result of worries. The outside perspective of an external narrator is, in this case, necessary to add a perspective to the inner woes of the characters because of skewed judgement.

Without the external perspective, both the setting of the novel and the characteristics of the different characters would be affected through the worried ‘inner world’ of one or more characters. The problem is caused because ‘the inner world is influenced by the outside world and also plays a part in perceiving the outside world’ (Drobot 150). The result of the external narration technique is to demonstrate the character’s limited perspective of the overall situation, which in turn leads to worry about confrontations.

The perspective of narration is either established per chapter (*SoB*) or per paragraph (*RH*). The perspective of *SoB* is consistently given in the first or second line of the chapter with syntax such as ‘It began when George ...’ (1); ‘Jean rinsed the stripy mugs ...’ (7); or ‘They hated the idea. As predicted. Katie could tell’ (14). These examples provide information of whose perspective is reported in the form of free indirect discourse.

*The Red House* has the occasional tendency to shift perspective mid paragraph, which is either indicated through name markings (‘Angela [was] hypnotised...’ (3)) or is left purposefully vague. On several occasions, the speaker needs to be derived from the characteristics of the object of the thoughts: ‘The formlessness of it all made him feel slightly ill [...] he wished he was better at embracing the chaos, loosening up a little. But the journey was always a circle’ (61). The ‘he’ in this passage is not named, but the content and context suggest that the speaker is Richard, whose life is portrayed to be neatly ordered.

In this way, the text can convey a sense of fragmentation on the narratological level. Thoughts are separated (and thus fragmented) from the actor to whom they belong. By doing so, the narrator rejects the traditional structure of external narration by reporting in free indirect discourse without a clear referent. The absent referent further enhances the theme of alienation between body and mind and is reminiscent of Modernist narratives.

The external narrator can, moreover, provide information on thoughts without the selective layer that character narration would have. Haddon’s narratives highlight the entirety of a thought process through verbs that signify a developing quality to resemble the emergence of thoughts as they occur within a character: ‘[Louisa] thought that if she let go of the past it would be carried away by that same flood, but it was dawning on her for the first time that she would have to tell

[Richard] before Melissa did' (*RH* 136). Even though the content of what is going through Louisa's mind is active ('if she let go of the past it would be carried away...') is a phrase that could be a realistically verbalised thought) the mimesis of the way the thoughts are portrayed conveys the construction of thoughts. The verbalised thought is marked through 'she thought', but the narrator's external perspective shows how this thought causes another thought to 'dawn on her', thus reporting thought prior to personal reflection. The state of thoughts that lack personal reflection is the reason why the word "worry" is usually absent in the phase of possibility. In this passage, Louisa worries that Melissa will tell Richard about her sexual past before Louisa has said anything. The thoughts are not yet evaluated by the characters themselves as worry, because the thoughts are emerging.

In *SoB*, the external narrator uses rhetoric devices to show the hyperbolic qualities of the worried thoughts of the characters. The alternation between free indirect discourse and general external narration allows the narrator to produce a meaning of events that is different from the character's experience of these events. When George has reached a (false) state of realisation that the bumps on his thigh are indeed cancer, the narrator reports his thought process in the following way: 'It was ebbing a little. He was dying of cancer. It was a horrible thought. But if he could just store it over there, in the 'Thoughts about Dying of Cancer' box, he might be OK' (*SoB* 104). In this passage, there initially seems to be little distance and difference between the narrator's text and character focalisation; the narrator just as well states that George 'was dying of cancer'. The tone of certainty in this passage in contrast to the context of the rest of the novel, however, is used as a rhetoric tool to display the folly of the situation. The narrator inserts a sense of cynicism that is enabled through the alternation between the novel's free indirect discourse and descriptions and details given by the narrator throughout the text.

The effect of the narrative level of distance means that passages such as the above example can be read as a prognosis of the character's mental state. The narrator undermines George's credibility through the assertiveness in which George has concluded he is dying of cancer, when it can be deduced from the context that this is not the case. The regression of George's mental state is also presented through the fact that the external narrator displays George's thoughts as they occur in his mind in an otherwise coherent paragraph: 'Obviously, it was a surprise to find that one was insane. [...] *Crazy* was the word he had always used. As in *crazy paving*, or *crazy golf*. Everything jumbled and out of order and rather amusing' (147). George is verbally focalising his

thoughts in this passage, which is shown through the “jumbled” syntax (‘and out of order and rather amusing’). Through the rhetoric, the external narrator conveys George’s deterioration without any explicit commentary.

Direct speech is only present in a conversational context in both primary texts. It is notable that personal pronouns and speech markers are mostly absent in these conversations, indicating that the external narrator is ‘absent’. This narrative technique is what Bal calls ‘non-narrative embedded texts’ (64), which ‘may be anything, from assertions about things in general, [but] the most predominant form is dialogue’ (64). Even though the voice of the external narrator is absent in this form of non-narrative embedded texts, its absence still adds context. As Bal asserts, the absence of the narrator in spoken dialogue provides ‘subliminal signs’ (66), which are ‘not intended by the speaker, but are nevertheless decisive. As such, they are part of the primary narrator’s rhetoric, even if not a single word is uttered by this primary narrator occurs in the text’ (66).

The lack of context provided by the narrator in the non-narrative embedded texts mirrors the confusion and misconstrued understandings that the characters in both novels have of one another, thus creating a sense of alienation through miscommunication. Two examples from both texts can demonstrate this. The following passage from *SoB* is an interaction between George and Jean about George’s worries about death:

‘I’m frightened of dying.’ There. He had said it.

‘That’s absurd’ [...]

‘I think it’s cancer.’

‘But it’s not cancer.’

‘Dr Barghoutian said it was eczema.’

‘So why are you worried about it?’

‘There are these tiny red spots on my arm.’ (141)

It should be noted that just before this passage, the narrative states that ‘[Jean] was angry with him. She had been angry with him before. This was his old life. It felt comforting’ (141), implying that George feels comfortable in sharing his fears because Jean’s anger creates the setting of a familiar situation. George thus feels “balanced” enough to explain what has been bothering him without considering that his affected behaviour has also affected the relationship between Jean and him. The narrator implies that George feels that by the act of telling, he has made his surroundings aware of the possibility of him dying of cancer (‘I’m frightened of dying [...] I think it’s cancer’),

whereas Jean thinks that George is making a fuss out of nothing ('why are you worried about it').

The dialogue consists of sentences that, despite sharing the same subject, have entirely different objectives in the same situation. What follows is the above interaction without any speaker indicators, which mimics both characters' inability to read what the other character is thinking. The "subliminal sign" that the narrator conveys is that even though the reader is aware of the thought process of each individual character, there is a gap in the understanding between the characters.

In a similar manner, the following interaction in *RH* exemplifies the alienating effect of not having any speech markers in dialogue:

[Daisy's] eyes were damp and sore. *I told everyone you were ill.*

*Thanks.*

*But you're not ill, are you?*

*Dad ...*

*What's wrong?*

*Daisy closed her eyes.*

*If there's anything I can do ...*

*There's nothing you can do.*

*I'm worried about you. [sic] (207)*

The dialogue occurs after Daisy tries to kiss her stepsister Melissa, an act which has caused Daisy to be worried about her sexual orientation. The only characters who are aware of this event are Daisy and Melissa. The lack of interjections by the external narrator in the above dialogue means that there is no information regarding what Dominic is thinking. Also, there is no information about why Dominic is aware that something else is wrong with Daisy; the absent markers give a false implication of Dominic being aware of what happened when narratively, this is not possible.

The non-embedded narrative text thus, in this case, enhances the sense of alienation between the characters. The characters seem to be convinced that they are involved and invested when they have conversations with completely different objectives. As Mieke Bal states, 'if [...] the contact between the two most important actors is predominantly mental and unsuccessful, we could conclude [...] that the theme is alienation' (200). Both examples of interaction have the potential to lead to a functional event but do not seem to directly lead anywhere, and thus they create a sense of alienation.

Moreover, understanding the inefficient communication in these two passages helps to contextualise the different kinds of worry that occur in this dialogue. In the passage from *SoB*,

worry can be categorised as the inability to put things into perspective: it is significant that the word ‘worry’ is uttered by Jean, who is not worried but is instead communicating to George that his worry is unfounded because he does not have cancer. In the passage from *RH*, worry can be attributed to the category of nurture and care; Dominic is worried about his daughter not because he has noticed a change in her behaviour but because of the instinctive duty of a parent who witnesses his or her upset child. Later in the same paragraph, the narrator states that Dominic ‘wanted to lift her up and hug her like he did when she was tiny’ (207), something which further affirms that the source of Dominic’s worry to be nurture.

The issue of perspective is important in both *SoB* and *RH* both in the traditional narratological meaning of “perspective”, and in the sense of worry being caused (and sustained) by the inability to put problems into perspective. Mieke Bal makes the distinction between narration and focalisation by arguing that focalisation ‘implies an important statement on *vision*: conversion is defined as *seeing*, not in a positivistic or in a psychological but in a narratological sense; seeing differently, and seeing difference turns the fabula around, makes the character different’ (Bal 19). The fact that these narratives have an external narrator that uses focalisation to provide the perspective of the different characters shows the characters’ interpretation of the events of the fabula. The personalised vision simultaneously affects the actors’ reactions to these events. In the interaction between George and Jean, the perspectives of both George and Jean can be contextualised through the vision both characters have of one another as it is given in their preceding focalised passages.

Apart from textual markers of personal pronouns and names to signify focalisation, the narrator uses repetitive thoughts and themes to signal who is the focaliser. Bal states that ‘in the course of a narrative the relevant characteristics are repeated so often [...] that they emerge more and more clearly. Repetition is thus an important principle of the construction of the image of a character’ (126). Haddon’s two novels contain many textual repetitions, and combined with the underlying tone of constant worry or concern, these repetitions not only function to create a character but emphasise the matters about which they worry.

A result of these repetitions is that the characters are constructed partly through their worries, which makes the representation of worry in the narratives more prominent. George’s chapters always mention his potential cancer; Jamie’s passages always mention either his love of order or the recent ending of his relationship; Richard’s recurring thoughts are mostly related to

masculinity; and Dominic's passages focus on his marriage, fatherhood, and 'other lives [and how you] never did get to lead them' (5). The constant recurrence of certain characteristics creates a "realistic" character but also, as Bal argues, reveals otherwise seemingly unconnected themes and concerns.

A theme that is introduced early in relation to George is that 'the secret of contentment, George felt, lay in ignoring many things completely' (4). This information about George's character helps to scrutinise what the supposed cancer signifies; it serves as a means of distraction to '[ignore] many things completely' (4). The external narrator signals George's perspective through the personal marker of 'George felt'. Moreover, the manifestation of George's worry on a physical object is his rationalisation of anxious feelings: 'Of course he felt appalling. That was what anxiety did, persuaded you to get out of dangerous situations fast' (10). *A Spot of Bother* primarily focuses on worry through physicality, and this phrase reinforces the emphasis on a kind of primal instinct anxiety as a reaction to danger. The conviction that George has cancer allows him to evade family issues as well as the acknowledgement of his irrational fear of death.

A repetition used in relation to Dominic's character is his need for distraction from his own problems by fantasising about other lives. One of the first introductions to Dominic's character is when he is flipping through a book of maps of the area to which the families are headed. He consequently starts to wonder about 'all those other lives' and how 'You never did get to lead them' (5). Dominic's character is defined by regretting the lives he did not lead, which is an existential issue that is brought up frequently: 'How many more worlds were hiding around the corner and over the hill?' (184). The theme of 'various worlds' signifies the concept of exploring various possibilities, especially when it is linked to T.S. Eliot's 'Burnt Norton' about 'perpetual possibilities' (Eliot 7) that exist 'only in a world of speculation' (8). The repetition of this theme, which has a subtext of "what if", contributes to the sense that Dominic is worried in the same existential fashion as the speaker of 'Burnt Norton'.

The word 'world' occurs seventy-seven times in the narrative and is never used in a context of unification. Instead it is used as an image of parallels existing next to one another by all characters. Louisa, for instance, is introduced through the narrator's observation that 'she seemed to hover between worlds' (17). The fragmented sense of the world that the characters have could also be a metaphor for them not feeling grounded enough; this is emphasised by narrative descriptors such as 'hovering'. The novel's employment of fragmentation is a logical result from



the worries of the actors in the story about time, expectations, uniqueness, and social etiquette. Fragmentation of the narrative structure as well as the physical fragmentation between mind and body in *RH* defamiliarises personal identity, signifying detachment and alienation.

The third sense of perspective – in which *SoB* and *RH* form a dichotomy – lies in the use of intertextuality. Mieke Bal discusses intertextuality in the context of levels of narration (69), but for clarity, I consider intertextuality as a form of focalisation, because intertextuality in the way it is employed in *RH* adds an additional, unspecified voice. Like any other form of focalisation introduces an additional perspective. In addition, as Graham Allen argues in *Intertextuality: The New Critical Idiom* (2000), the term ‘Intertextuality [...] foregrounds notions of relationality, interconnectedness and interdependence in modern cultural life’ (Allen 5). The use of intertextuality thus lies in the novels’ dichotomy of a self-contained narrative versus the “fluid” boundaries of the narrative.

The story of *RH* is embedded in the notion of interconnectedness with human history, and intertextuality can be used as a tool to enhance interconnectedness. As I have established, *SoB* is far more self-contained in both its sequence of events and the way that the characters’ focus of worry lies within the physical text. The use of intertextuality can explain the different thematic uses of putting problems into perspective in both novels. The issue of perspective in *SoB* relies on a disturbed balance between the characters and their direct surroundings, whereas *RH* approaches perspective as a disturbed balance between the characters on a larger scale of time and context. The difference in the context in which the characters experience worry explains the unequal use of intertextuality between the two texts.

In *SoB*, the act of reading is mostly related to the act of looking for distraction. There are occasional in-text remarks about not reading enough: ‘the tiredness [...] the fact that she hadn’t read a novel in six months’ (*SoB* 98) and ‘reading seemed an onerous task at this point in the evening’ (130). Intertextual passages are then largely absent because the purpose of literature in the novel does not seem to be that of recognition and identification. The fact that the characters do not seem to be concerned with including different perspectives on life through literature adds to the general sense that the characters have difficulties putting problems in perspective.

There is one singular moment in the entire novel where there is a direct passage cited from another text (complete with proper citation):

Jamie got himself a second coffee and reopened Daniel Dennett's *Consciousness explained* [...] 'This does not mean that the brain never uses 'buffer memories' to cushion the interface between the brain's internal processes and the asynchronous outside world. The 'echoic memory' with which we preserve stimulus patterns briefly while the brain begins to process them is an obvious example' (Sperling 1960; Neisser 1967; see also Newell, Rosenbloom, and Laird, 1989, p. 1067) [sic] (*SoB* 170)

The only example of intertextuality in the novel occurs at the point where a character is physically reading something. Moreover, the passage is a clinical and anatomical explanation of the workings of the mind, which aligns with the novel's physical approach to worry. The passage simultaneously mirrors the narrative structure of the novel, which exists out of repetitions of deictic characteristics and the characters' tendencies to rely on old habits to cope with current problems resulting from change. However, there is little actual commentary upon the passage that is inserted, which reinforces the novel's theme of characters struggling with connectedness and perspective.

The sole in-text comment regarding the passage is that Jamie 'didn't want to look like someone who was having difficulty reading *Consciousness Explained*' (170). This comment reveals that Jamie is worried about how others might regard his actions, which leads to the performative act of 'let[ting] his eyes drift over the pages, turning them every couple of minutes' (170). The performance of the act of letting his eyes drift over the page, or pretending to be reading because of worry of social judgment, shows how actions can be driven by worry. The performance also serves as precaution for a possibility of judgment from others.

This passage reflects Jamie's characteristics, as his reaction to disturbed patterns is reflected in the passage, and he is shown to be very systematic in his approach. The intertextual reference is consequently interpolated in the narrative with a correct academic citation. At the same time, the content of the passage is a systematic approach in understanding the workings of the mind. Jamie is worried about not having control, which is depicted in Jamie's rhetoric in instances where he is not in control: 'And again it felt like the parachute jump. [...] The fog of alcohol cleared briefly and it occurred to Jamie that this was why Tony had left. Because Jamie always wanted to be in control. Because he was frightened of anything different or improper' (175).

The image of a 'parachute jump' signifies a fall that is not free but controlled by an object outside of one's self; 'a person who is afraid of falling in a physical sense also fears losing control of his feelings. This fear is not always a conscious one [...] on the unconscious level he is just as afraid of falling as of letting out his feelings' (Ekenstam 19). Moreover, the syntax of diction such as 'and again' marks the echoic buffer (which in this case is a metaphor) of a feeling previously

experienced. The proceeding conclusion made in the narrative is that Jamie's behavioural patterns are the cause of his current position. The passage further underlines the idea that Jamie's worries seem to stem from the pressure of social normativity, which is described as appearing differently to the outside. It is noticeable that the conclusion Jamie draws from the cause and effect of his behaviour comes not long after Jamie has read *Consciousness Explained*. However, neither Jamie nor the external narrator verbally makes this connection.

Once Jamie has had a revelation regarding the source of his worries, he is able to rationalise the worries he has about people around him. Jamie can consequently help other characters place their worries in perspective directly in the narrative. Jamie seems to have a clearer view of the family situation than Katie and Jean, who think that George having psychological issues is unimaginable: 'His father worrying too much and his mother saying she couldn't take it anymore. That he could imagine. That was pretty much situation normal' (180). Jamie's perspective also shows that his father is worried about minor things that are disproportioned by George's inability to recognise the recurring cycle of worry. According to Jamie's perspective, situations like these are not unfamiliar to his mother and father, but they just seem to lack the larger perspective of the cyclical habit of their behaviour. The function of the singular intertextual passage in *SoB*, then, is to move from the phase of possibility to the phase of realisation and result; it serves to add a layer of perspective that the characters need to be able to make any progression.

*The Red House* interpolates intertextual passages – as well as passages that have an arbitrary deviation from the primary story – throughout the narrative with a frequent interval. Intertextuality reflects the novel's wider theme of the characters being part of a 'human history' (*RH* 51), because it creates a connection between their story and other stories. However, the physical interconnectedness is absent through the fact that the passages are inserted without any introduction or conclusion to the primary story, thus mirroring the fragmentation of connectedness between the actors in the novel. The intertextuality also reflects the novel's theme of non-uniqueness; the function of intertextuality is to '[promote] a new vision of meaning, and thus of authorship and reading: a vision resistant to ingrained notions of originality, uniqueness, singularity and autonomy' (Allen 6).

The issue of non-uniqueness is something that all the characters have problems with in *RH*, which forms a contrast to the earlier passage about Jamie being 'frightened of anything different or improper' (175). The narrator in *RH* states about Melissa, for example, that 'Her only worry

sometimes was that she didn't look different enough, that people mistook her for part of a crowd' (147). This comment seems to be from the external narrator rather than Melissa's direct thoughts; there is no active verb implying any level of focalisation. Melissa's need to be discerned from others is a vital element to the story, as she is notably trying to exclude herself from the larger family narrative that occurs in *RH*, and her concerns are mostly related to issues at school and personal identity.

Moreover, Melissa is reading Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1600). It is directly implied that the textual references in *RH*, in some way, thematically run synchronously to the characters' experience of life. The synchronicity is overtly stated through Melissa's focalisation when 'she tries to make it sound funny but no one laughs, because it's not *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, is it? More like *Doctor Faustus*. A deal with the devil. She could make people do anything she wanted, but she had no idea what she wanted' (336). Her realising that the fact that she is directing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at school is not an excuse to manipulate people in real life marks the narrative point of the phase of realisation and result for Melissa's character. The realisation furthermore points to the negative effect of connectedness through literary works, since reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has a negative influence on her behaviour and creates a barrier between her and those around her.

The presence of intertextuality emphasises the issue of interpretation relying on context, which is one of the causes for alienation between the different characters. Allen states that 'the term intertextuality was initially employed by poststructuralist theorists and critics in their attempt to disrupt notions of stable meaning and objective interpretation' (3). Without any further contextualisation by neither narrator or character, the interpretation of the insertion relies entirely on the preconceived notions of the characters in the story and the reader, further implementing the sense of instability that looms in the story.

Moreover, the vague intertextual references allow for a more fluid reading of the novel, which creates a dialogue between the narrative text and its addressee. The intertextual passages are not fixed, which mirrors the state of the characters in *RH*. The presence of the passages is instable and relies on the perspective of who is focalising and reading, thus creating, in Bakhtinian terms, a dialogue (Allen 22-23). For example, even small passing remarks such as 'That bell-jar feeling, everything muffled and far off' (152-153) are susceptible to different interpretations. Depending on both the actor's and the reader's familiarity with the referential text, the remark can

either be read as Richard feeling isolated (plausible in the contextualisation of the themes of the novel) or can be read as an assertion that Richard is suffering from a clinical depression (a reference to the imagery of a bell jar as it functions in Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar*). The uncertainty of meaning is one way in which the narrative form contributes to the general sense of uncertainty as well as the issue of perspective, which are both represented as causes for worry in the text.

Perspective also plays a large role in how the characters are depicted and perceived as worriers and non-worriers, especially considering the theme of alienation in both narratives. The primary texts show individual members being alienated from one another, which is emphasised through different perspectives of the same events. The different perspectives demonstrate how all characters have misconstrued concepts of what occurs in the other characters' lives and minds. Worries arise through alienation, and each character handles alienation differently. It can be argued that in the resolution of both stories, these worries are resolved by voicing them.

The narrative resolution to worry, then, is driven by the three stages of possibility, realisation, and result. Worry exists in the phase of possibility, awareness of these worries exists in the phase of realisation, and the phase of result is a confrontation of these worries between two actors or an actor and an object. Voicing worries and placing them in a shared space provides new perspective. If worry can arrive through uncertainty, and concern about others is one of the primary worries in the text, the narrative suggests that worry can be resolved by being offered a sense of certainty about possible outcomes through awareness of what another character is thinking.

The misconstrued conceptions of other characters' ability to be worried about something is constantly emphasised. During a scene in *RH*, Louisa says that '*It's good for Richard being here [...] Stop him worrying about things. / I cannot imagine Richard worrying*, said Dominic. [...] *Not like the rest of us worry [sic]*' (82). This clear opposition between Richard's internal landscape and Dominic's perception of Richard's character emphasises the sense of alienation. Without the addition of Richard's focalisation (showing a development of his worries during the progression of the narrative), his character would be understood in different terms.

As Richard begins to feel increasingly imbalanced, he thinks about how 'people lived entire lives with this level of anxiety, not even pathological, just part of the human condition' (185), which is a significant moment of realisation that feelings of anxiety (worry) are part of life and are therefore inevitable. Richard, who is stated to wish that 'he was better at embracing the chaos' (61) is shown to like life in neat order. However, as the fabula progresses through resurfacing

memories of Richard and Angela's childhood, Richard begins to wonder if 'he, too, had been damaged, by their father dying, by their mother drinking' (288). It is Richard's self-proclaimed 'lack of interest in his own interior landscape...' (284) that points to the lack of perspective and understanding that Richard has always maintained by ignoring problems. Ignoring problems and the systematic approach to possibility seem to be characteristics attributed to male characters in both novels, which is something I will discuss this at greater length in the second part of this thesis.

Examples of the importance of focalisation to understand the worried nature of a character are more present in *SoB*. As opposed to *RH*, the novel contains outside characters because of the non-isolated setting of the story. David Symmonds, the man with whom Jean is having an affair, is generally constructed as a non-worrier. However, since David is not a focaliser in any of the chapters, his character is only viewed through the eyes of others, something which enhances and creates a calm image. David can, of course, still worry, as is shown here: "“Please, Jean, I’ve been practising this for several weeks. Just let me get it out in one go without making a fool of myself.” She’d never seen him looking nervous before’ (106). This passage highlights Jean’s uncertainty about David’s disposition, which is shared by the reader because the narrator does not provide us with David’s thoughts. It is shown that David can still worry though, and that he needs consolidation through the confirmation of others.

Ray is similarly depicted as a calm and collected character, which is illustrated by the contrast between his behaviour and that of the Hall family. Like David, Ray is not a focaliser, which affirms this perception of his character. The worry that Ray experiences is thus expressed through different means, for instance by the use of repetitive rhetoric in which Ray reassures others that he will take good care of Katie when they get married: 'I’m a lucky guy, George. I know that. I’ll look after your daughter. You don’t need to worry on that score' (11). The repetitiveness of the issue of their upcoming marriage is what points to the presence of worry. However, the context of 'worry' in this case, is that Ray feels that he needs to reassure George because Ray can sense doubt within the Hall family regarding the marriage. Ray’s repetitive reaffirmations are a narrative tool to depict Ray’s worries about the wedding without portraying his thoughts through focalisation.

The representation of worry in a literary text is largely dependent on the narratological structure of the story. *A Spot of Bother* and *RH* are driven by worry first through the narrative use of thought report. Second, the way the worries are represented is dependent upon the sequential

ordering of the novels, which is self-contained versus fluid. Third, the narrative form contributes to the novels' themes of alienation and lack of communication through individual focalisation as well as non-narrative embedded texts. As a consequence, the alienation is shown to further increase worry in each character because they have misconstrued understandings of one another, something which disables the possibility for successful confrontation between them. The narrative, therefore, remains in the state of deficiency that occurs in the phase of possibility. Worry is represented prominently in both novels because the narrative lingers in the characters' contemplation of future possibilities and that what might have been.

### **Stability: Worry, Gender and the Domestic Sphere**

This section aims to discuss and contextualise the represented worry on the level of story related to the theoretical framework of gender as performance and the gendered domestic sphere. First, I argue that the experience of worry is influenced by the boundaries of masculine or feminine standards. The premise of the worry that is represented in the texts is tied to a socio-historical context; possibilities and choices are determined by a cultural setting.

Gendered domestic roles are instrumental in determining how and when individuals express worry verbally. If gender is an influential component in controlling what one worries about, family life consequently also plays a role in worrying, because the family is a gendered institution. The terms ‘mother’, ‘father’, ‘daughter’, and ‘son’ imply certain requirements: ‘as a social institution [...] the family carries with it hegemonic cultural schemas of men’s and women’s expected roles within it that are more specific, moralized instantiations of general stereotypes of women as communal and men as agentic’ (Ridgeway 152). It can be argued that the gendered organisation of the family determines what one worries about.

Stereotypical notions of gendered roles create certain expectations of behaviour from each role, and ‘cultural ideas about gendered practices in the domestic sphere may become so deeply embedded that women and men hang on to them with some tenacity’ (Chapman 2). The family institution is the primary setting in which behaviours that constitute femininity and masculinity are taught and thus perpetuated; ‘home is in this sense ‘a medium and the outcome – both enabling and constraining people and action’ (1990: 208)’ (Donley-Reid qtd. in Chapman 20).

The family is cultivated through ideas about gendered practices. These gendered practices are then repeated in a cycle as they are transferred from one generation onto the next. Both de Certeau and Aitken highlight that in itself, ‘culture is not information’ (de Certeau 254; Aitken 98), but it is formed through ‘a series of operations as a function of objectives and social relations’ (Aitken 98). Family relations are extensions of, or frameworks for, gender roles and how to fulfil them. Disturbances in familial patterns happen when ‘the commitments of family members are redefined, weakened, broken or abandoned’ (Aitken 121), and this is the case in both novels. George’s retirement and consequential confrontation with his home life that he has always distanced himself from changes the existing family dynamics; in a similar manner, the family reunion in *RH* exposes fundamental flaws in the family life of both siblings.



The relationship between worry and the domestic sphere exists partly due to the types of worry that are represented in-text: nurture and care, pressure to conform to social etiquette in fear of outside judgment or ‘translating every worry into a worry about something not being done properly’ (*SoB* 283), as well as changed behavioural patterns. The different types of worry, thus, are all related to how one behaves and how this behaviour is publicly displayed. For this reason, conforming to dominant notions of “accepted” behaviour is a cause for worrying before a character performs an activity, as well as a source for worrying about the perception of outsiders after a certain behaviour has been publicly displayed.

*A Spot of Bother* and *RH* both show that male characters struggle with boundaries of masculinity as much as female characters struggle with the boundaries of femininity. Butler’s theory on gender presupposes that gender is merely performative, tied to socially constructed behaviours and patterns, and her theory thus aims to expose that gender relies on a series of repetitious acts and habits (*Gender Trouble* 177). I will demonstrate how Haddon’s texts show that gender boundaries invite worry through their creation of cultural values and norms; once the repetitious acts that enforce the reinsertion of such gender boundaries are destabilised, the characters start to worry. Gender consequently becomes a place of uncertainty. Instability is a fundamental element in causing worry: instability invites possibility because there is no certainty or stability that is offered.

In Haddon’s texts, the male characters primarily worry about not being masculine enough, and these worries regarding reinstating their masculinity drive them to perform acts that constantly affirm their masculine status. Worry in these texts then partly causes the perpetuation of gendered norms that Butler discusses in her theory. The continuous repetition of masculine behaviour in order to establish the character’s masculine position makes their behaviour seem natural, yet the novels’ narrative form reveals that these behaviours are in fact reliant on conscious, active thoughts about such acts and how to perform them. The conscious thoughts about masculine behaviour are most overtly present in alpha male characters such as Richard and Alex. The constant reinstatement of masculinity, moreover, correlates to the image of the distant or detached father figure, which is shown in the characters of George and Dominic.

The fact that the father figures in the two novels are suggested to be “naturally” more detached from their children further enables the continuation of distant fathers, as the family is one place where behaviour is taught and thus perpetuated through generations. The male characters in

Haddon's texts, as I will discuss later, are shown to be primarily worried about their individual presence in the relational dynamic through their focus on appearing masculine in behaviour.

The female characters, on the other hand, are not shown to constantly worry about appearing feminine enough. Their femininity seems to be judged through their fulfilment of the classical notions of the maternal role. It can be said that because the women in Haddon's texts are shown in a relational context, i.e. as wives and mothers, their femininity is defined by the dominant male dynamics. As de Beauvoir discusses in *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949), the man is the subject and the woman is the object; women are defined by what they lack; feminine identity is negated from male presence (105).

The notion that the primary duty of women is to be successful mothers is also a way for the male characters to demonstrate their masculine dominance in the texts. This notion, according to de Beauvoir, is created by patriarchy, and the fact that it is internalised to the point where it feels natural signifies a presence of male dominance (105). Angela's descent into a mental breakdown, for example, originates in a miscarriage she had 18 years prior to the events of *RH*, but the feeling of failure in not being able to produce a healthy child still haunts her. As I will discuss later, the inversion of gendered family tasks, as is the case in Angela and Dominic's family, is shown to not function effectively. Moreover, Dominic's position as the caregiver causes him to appear less masculine to his surroundings.

Simone de Beauvoir, in her discussion about motherhood, states that 'It is through motherhood that woman [*sic*] fully achieves her physiological destiny; that is her "natural" vocation, since her whole organism is directed toward the perpetuation of the species' (597). The concept of the distant father in both texts indicates the expectation of women to fulfil the role of nurturer and caregiver. However, Stuart Aitken emphasises the cultivated quality of the nurturing mother by contesting the notion that women have a different relationship to their children simply because they are the carriers: '[g]ender is socially imposed division of the sexes, and this includes women's seeming natural relations to the birth process' (95). Harriet Bradley similarly calls caring and nurturing '[...] the archetypal qualities for the mother' (*Gender* 109).

The mothers in Haddon's novels – Jean, Katie, Louisa, and Angela – seem to be particularly invested in their spouses and their children, which makes their position as a wife and mother their primary identification and thus their main source for worrying. Women are also said to be worried about planning ahead for their future at an earlier stage than men, partly because of their biological

clock (Brannen & Nilsen 32-33). Worries for women are therefore also tied to the biological window they have to reach motherhood. One of Jean's chapters focuses entirely on her worry about George and places the worry in a relational context to her children; 'She was being silly. Accidents didn't happen to people like George. [...] Why was she even thinking about such things? Too many years spent worrying about teenage children going to parties and taking drugs. Too many years spent remembering birthdays and unplugging hot curling tongs left on bedroom carpets' (122).

Gender, then, creates expectations of how to behave in order to conform to the notions of what is regarded as feminine or masculine. One such behaviour that is considered "feminine", I argue, is the expression of worry. Seidler states that

a dominant masculinity would often suppress signs of sadness because they so easily could reflect badly in their male identities. Rather it is women who have emotions [...] Often men learn to discount their emotional needs, especially in public. So it is that men often learn to suppress their emotions, since emotions are sited in the body, they are "controlled" as men learn to exercise self-control (80)

Both texts seem to conform to the notion that male characters are expected to exercise this sense of self-control by not appearing to be worried, concerned, or emotional in any form. In *SoB*, the amount of times worry is expressed either verbally or in thought regarding another family member is significantly higher in relation to Jean or Katie until the point when George starts behaving strangely. The fact that worry in the text is often used in relation to female characters suggests that the female characters are (expected to be) more prone to feelings of worry than male characters. In *RH*, twenty out of twenty-nine times, worry is expressed by or in relation to the female characters, further emphasising the notion.

Both primary texts use water imagery to describe the feeling of worry, such as in the observation of 'Anxiety, content, how fluid and unpredictable the mind was' (*RH* 307). In 'The Gender of Waves' (2017), Stefan Helmreich suggests that waves, in their history of symbolism, are related to femininity and feminine issues. This relation exists culturally in semantics such as feminist waves, but it also exists as a persistent image in literature in the form of 'the women-in-the-water; woman as water, as a stormy, cavorting, cooling ocean, a raging stream, a waterfall; as a limitless body of water that ships pass through . . . woman as the enticing (or perilous) deep; as a cup of bubbling body fluids; the vagina as wave, as foam' (Theleweit qtd. in Helmreich 31). In ancient texts such as those of Saint-Augustine, waves carried with them symbols of maternal and mortal materiality (32). Thus, like the act of worrying in relation to nurture and care, waves have

a history of being perceived as maternal and therefore feminine. However,

Water is shown to most commonly symbolise chaos or ‘a formlessness that engulfs all form, a disorder that threatens all order’ (Grosz 203). This threatening of all order that Grosz describes can be related to feelings of worry; the unpredictability of water as a bigger force mirrors the feeling of uncertainty, which is related to the worry represented in the narratives. Water in its oceanic form represents the uncontrollable; water can represent the unknown, as well as the image of waves mirroring the feeling of worry as it comes and goes. As Helmreich states, ‘Ocean waves [are] icons of rhythmic and predictable motion as well as of chaos and destruction’ (29), the image of rhythmic waves resembles the feeling described by Richard of ‘little waves of anxiety [that] rose and fell’ (*RH* 254).

The notion of “gendered waves” and water imagery enhances the essentialist implication that worrying, at least superficially, is a gendered phenomenon mostly related to female characters (due to archetypal images of emotional women versus pragmatic men). The narrative perspective of the novels, however, is the first deviance of stereotypical masculine views because it shows both male and female thought processes, which are largely reliant upon emotions. According to Harriet Bradley, there is reluctance, or a sense of weakness attached to men baring their souls (*Gender* 57). It is notable that the water metaphors are primarily used in relation to male characters in the primary texts; the male characters are baring their souls but are still using stylistic devices, so the expression of emotion is still placed outside of their own being.

Waves signify more than chaos and a disruption of order. Water in its oceanic form also has the characteristic of the rhythmic ebb and flow that occurs due to forces of nature rather than through human control, which shares mutability with the experience of worry. Alex, the teenage son in *RH*, is portrayed as straightforward and pragmatic. On the fifth day in the cottage during the family holiday, however, an extensive metaphor about worry and water is introduced through Alex’s focalisation:

The ebb and flow of Celts and Saxons and Vikings. Something solid with something fluid moving over it, which seemed like a pretty good model for pretty much everything, stuff you could rely on interacting with stuff you couldn’t. Facts and opinions. Feelings and thoughts. Because he still didn’t really understand that this was only one way of looking at the world, and that there were people who looked around and saw no fixed landscape whatsoever, only ebb and flow over which they had no control (206)

The emphasis in Alex’s passage is placed on the issues of control and perspective, which are wider themes of both primary texts. The metaphor finds its ground in ‘something solid’, signifying the

worriess state. However, the ground of ‘something solid’, is covered in ‘something fluid moving over it’; in relation to the image of ebb and flow, the ‘something’ can be interpreted as water. The image this creates is that if waves signify worry, this worry can be experienced as all encompassing, covering the sense of stability that one temporarily loses when worried.

Alex also highlights the dichotomy between fact (certainty) and opinion as well as feeling and thought, pointing to the influence of emotion and perspective in relation to a stable matter (facts). The narrator intervenes and continues the extended metaphor, however, stating that Alex himself also has issues relating to other perspectives because ‘he still didn’t really understand that this was only one way of looking at the world’, and that for others around him, the stability is less visible. The experience of worry can overshadow the idea that most problems one worries about are temporary and will disperse to uncover solid ground again. Despite the ‘fixed landscape’ showing between tides, worry becomes overwhelming when one focuses primarily on the moment that the fixed landscape is covered by water, rather than the moment of ebb when the fixed landscape is visible.

In *SoB*, the water metaphors are primarily found in George’s passages. George is arguably the character that experiences instability the most: ‘The terror came and went in waves. When a wave washed over him he felt much as he did several years ago when he watched a small boy run into the road outside Jacksons, narrowly missing the bonnet of a braking car. Between the waves he gathered his strength for the next one’ (*SoB* 147). The use of figurative language seems to imply that George is unable to process his emotions. The water imagery depicts a sense of powerlessness which is further stressed by the adjacent image of a small boy who is nearly run over by a car. However, the passage also reflects the notion that the feeling of powerlessness is temporary by emphasising the pauses between the waves. The image of ‘between waves’ in which George ‘gathered strength for the next one’ can be interpreted as resembling the cycles of worry.

Waves as metaphors also illustrate the overwhelming feeling of a temporary, sudden worry. The image of waves washing over him depicts the experience of worry as all encompassing, drowning any other perspective. Water imagery also occurs, for example, when Dominic is worried about ending the affair with Amy. The narrative describes Dominic’s feelings as ‘a monumental wave of absolute dark that looked as if it was about to crash upon him’ (265) because he is worried about ‘what [Amy] might do to herself, or to him, or his family’ (265). The ending of the affair, then, can be seen as an event in which the result will lead to new possibilities, and

Dominic feels drowned by unforeseeable possible outcomes. However, the wave metaphor in Dominic's passage does not create an image of disorder. Instead, his worry is caused by the uncontrollable actions of another person. Helmreich suggests that 'The oceanic metaphor under interrogation is not one that has waves as directionless disorder, but one that poses waves as lines of organized energy' (42). Waves, in this passage could be seen to reflect the force of an element outside oneself that can influence and direct one's life, something about which Dominic seems to be worried.

Helmreich also notes that 'Henry Wadsworth Longfellow [...] poses waves as delicate carriers of mournful news about the evanescence of life' (34). This is interesting as George struggles with worries about mortality, and images of the sea are most predominantly found in George's passages. Waves and water, of course, also carry with them the possibility of death through drowning. The water metaphor, then, can be utilised in George's passages to introduce the idea that he is worried about the issue of dying without directly addressing it.

The wave metaphor reoccurs after George has ingested a large dose of Valium that he has prescribed to calm his anxieties. The narrative states that 'he could feel it coming in, [...] the way they saw that storm coming off the sea at St Ives a few years ago, a grey wall of thickened light half a mile out, the water dark beneath it, everyone just standing and watching, not realising how fast it was moving until it was too late' (*SoB* 287). Despite this, George is still in denial regarding the fact that his problems are mental and stem from his worry about death.

The metaphor builds upon a 'storm coming off sea', which can be interpreted as the feelings of worry brought on by the unknown. The sea in the above metaphor can be read to symbolise George's anxieties, and the storm coming symbolises the fact that George is taking medication in a wrongful manner because he is taking it to suppress a problem he is not acknowledging. The passage furthermore predicts the upcoming event of George's erratic behaviour at Katie's wedding, where no one realises the seriousness of George's situation 'until it was too late'.

Harriet Bradley comments on the fact that 'feminine weaknesses were also thought to make women more vulnerable than men to insanity' (*Fractured Identities* 112). George's mental deterioration exposes the obsolete notion that insanity is somehow feminine, yet his difficulty accepting that his issues are 'all in the mind' (149) also exemplifies the rigorousness of these notions. O'Gorman argues that 'if sanity, in any way, is an ability to function adequately in the day-to-day world, then worry tells us that so-called sanity embraces the strange in a way that makes

the strange normal' (*Worrying* 83). Early in *SoB*, the narrative states that 'Of course [George] felt appalling. That was what anxiety did, persuaded you to get out of dangerous situations fast' (10). Chapters that have George as a focaliser place a notable emphasis on anxiety as a primal instinct, thus rationalising and normalising his mental issues.

George is unable to properly process his anxiety or even seeing it for what it is because he has trouble acknowledging the actual source of his problems: 'if he were given the choice he would rather someone had broken his leg. You did not have to explain what was wrong with a broken leg. Nor were you expected to mend it by force of will' (147). This thought also emphasises the lack of choice or control George has over the situation; he has trouble acknowledging his mental state because he is worried about having 'to explain what was wrong' and does not feel able to fix it 'by force of will'. Describing his feelings of worry through oceanic metaphors allows George to pretend that the problem lies outside of himself.

The fact that the more detailed uses of water imagery are primarily present in George's passages enhances the sense that he experiences the feeling of worry more intensely than his family does. Water imagery is present in a more nuanced version in relation to the other characters. The imagery is then primarily found in the form of a metonymy about sinking, which can be related back to the idiom of "a sinking heart". In one of the few occurrences of water imagery in *RH*, the narrator states that Daisy feels a 'nervous bubbling in her abdomen' (101) because she feels disoriented by not being in familiar surroundings. The image of 'bubbling' is extended in a water-context at the end of the passage, where the narrator ambiguously states that Daisy 'realised that it was her own heart that was sinking' (101). By using a metaphor instead of straightforward rhetoric, the narrator creates the sense that Daisy is worried about something she herself has not quite placed into context. In *SoB*, the imagery of 'sinking' is extended in a different manner through connotations to water objects: 'Jamie sat for a moment, letting it sink in, or drift away, or whatever it was going to do' (174). The idea of 'drifting' symbolises the notion that the worry that Jamie is experiencing is transformed from an image of heaviness (sinking) to a lighter feeling that can float over the water.

The water metaphor is altered slightly as the attitude towards worrying changes. When Jamie shows up to Katie's wedding looking 'as if he'd been dragged through a hedge backwards' (349), the narrative states that 'Jean's heart sank a little [...] Then Jean remembered her heart was not allowed to sink' (349). The statement that her heart is 'not allowed to sink' is placed in the

narrative point where the family realises that worrying about things they have no control over is pointless because it will not change the implications nor the outcomes of what has happened or will happen.

Even though waves culturally have a relation to the feminine, ‘Waves ... [are] membranes of energy from which matter forms and stabilizes (Keller 232). ‘Waves’, are then a ‘transition between states of energy, operating across matter, gender, and species’ (Helmreich 36). Wave and water metaphors are shown to historically have feminine connotations, which makes it all the more interesting that Haddon’s narrative places the imagery most frequently in relation to the male characters, thus demonstrating the universality of the emotion of worry. At the same time, however, it is implied that the male characters can only express these worries through figurative language.

The texts contain various passages that support the notion of worrying as a feminine quality: ‘Part of the problem was that Jean did not get depressed. She worried. She got angry. She got sad. And she felt all those things more strongly than he ever did. [...] but they always blew over in a day or two’ (*SoB* 148). George’s thought process relies on the notion that Jean, as a woman, experiences an array of emotions that are superficial and temporary. In this case, George’s own worries have led to a focus on the ebb and flow rather than the fixed landscape, making his problems not seem temporary and superficial but more permanent and earnest than Jean’s.

The notion of “female worriers” is merely one derived from the culturally constructed idea that women are more emotional than men and lack the sense of self-control that is associated with masculinity (Seidler 80). The limitation in perspective – caused by the alienation and ineffective communication present in both narratives – creates the idea that others do not worry. For example, in one of Jean’s chapters, the narrator contrasts George’s disposition with Jean’s when it is stated that ‘Jean didn’t like the way everything was becoming looser and messier, and moving slowly beyond her control. [...] Jean realised that everybody had a messy life. Except Ursula, maybe. And George.’ (69). The narrator implies that Jean thinks George’s life is not ‘messy’ because he does not outwardly express any distress about problems. In a similar manner, when Ray tells Katie ‘Don’t worry. I’m not going to ditch you at the altar’ (96), it implies that Ray expects Katie to worry about such a thing, even though the text shows that she does not. Ray’s perspective seems to be derived from the notion that because Katie is a woman, she must be concerned about such things.



Worrying is thus portrayed as a feminine weakness which can also be considered as unattractive, despite the fact that this type of feminine worry is closely related to empathy which is expected from women. In *RH*, '[Alex] is not sure if he still fancies Louisa or not, the way she's so pathetically worried about Richard' (239), showing that Louisa is seen as unattractive because she is showing weakness. The disdain of weakness is emphasised through the word 'pathetically'. In contrast, Dominic states about Richard – who is portrayed as a stereotypical alpha male – that he '*cannot imagine Richard worrying [...] Not like the rest of us worry [sic]*' (82). From an outsider's perspective, Richard's masculinity is supposed to prevent him from experiencing the emotion of worry. The behavioural expectation of worry, therefore, can be said to be determined by the sex of the character. The fact that most of the time, the expectation of someone worrying is shown to be a misconstrued perception of the other further enhances the alienation in the family dynamics in both texts.

The notion that worrying is a feminine quality can be related back to psychology and the idea that human behaviour is shaped by the different brains of the different sexes rather than through the social expectations of how men and women should behave. In *The Essential Difference* (2003), Baron-Cohen explores sexual differences in psychology in the following way:

A new theory claims that the female brain is predominantly hard-wired for empathy, and that the male brain is predominantly hard-wired for understanding and building systems. [...] Empathizing is the drive to identify another person's emotions and thoughts, and to respond to these with an appropriate emotion. The empathizer intuitively figures out how people are feeling, and how to treat people with care and sensitivity. Systemizing is the drive to analyse and explore a system, to extract underlying rules that govern the behaviour of a system; and the drive to construct systems. (1)

Response to worry, which is the reaction to the act of worrying, can be argued to likewise be dictated by the boundaries of gender, therefore being part of gender performance. The worry-responses as they are represented in Haddon's texts are shown to be driven more by the gendered roles the characters perform within the texts than from a biologically instinctive reaction.

The male characters in both texts seem to adhere to, while simultaneously struggle with, the notion that the male brain works 'systematically'. George, for example, considers his anxiety as a manifestation of danger signs that he is dying and systematically tries to tackle this problem. However, it is shown that the systematic approach, in a way, is a method to suppress his emotions rather than dealing with them. Richard tries to tackle his worries about not being masculine enough by repetitious acts that prove his masculinity but also concludes that this is merely a systematic

approach to avoid being in touch with his ‘interior landscape’ (*RH* 284). The image of male systemisers, however, is persistent and consequently, the female characters who tend more towards a systematic approach to worry (Katie and Melissa) are also depicted as women who do not adhere to classic images of conforming femininity.

The way Haddon’s characters are portrayed tends to adhere to the essentialist distinction in male and female worry-response, which becomes evident when the object of worry and worry-responses of the primary characters are explored. In *SoB*, George and Jamie are worried (primarily) about matters related to themselves: George about the lesion on his thigh and Jamie about the lack of control over his life since the ending of his relationship. Both men respond to these issues systematically; George cuts away the cancer himself when he feels that doctors do not respond appropriately, and Jamie thinks: ‘If Tony wanted to come back he could make the first move. Jamie wasn’t going to crawl. He was going to be single. And he was going to enjoy it’ (*SoB* 124). Jamie’s rhetoric relies on certainty (‘he wasn’t going to crawl’ / ‘he was going to enjoy it’), and the control over his own response to his unwanted position as a single man demonstrates his systematic approach to the newly introduced instability that he must process.

Jean is cast in a more traditionally feminine light and spends most of the novel worrying about family problems rather than about herself. Objects of Jean’s worries are the changed domestic situation (‘Thirty-five years of the house for yourself, then you had to share it with ... not a stranger exactly ....’ (7)), George’s changed behavioural patterns, and Katie’s wedding. The focus of Jean’s individual storyline is her extramarital affair with a man George’s age. Jean having an affair as a middle-aged woman defies gender stereotype, as conventionally, ‘any postmenopausal woman is by definition, as Germaine Greer would put it, a female eunuch’ (Sedgwick 15). Moreover, an extramarital affair signifies lust, and as Rubin argues, ‘part of the modern ideology of sex is that lust is the province of men’ (170).

In Jean’s mind, she is trying to justify her affair through the changed familial sphere: ‘it wasn’t like [George] had changed over the years. He was still honest. He was still dependable. But the world had changed. And so had she’ (42). Jean is portrayed as having overcome limited gendered expectations through her affair, but she is also shown to adhere to these same conventions, as her primary worries in life are about her family. In making the decision whether to leave George and be with David, Jean decides to stay with George because ‘When George hit [David], it was George she was worried about’ (383). Thus, Jean’s response to worry is more

emotion based, as she lets the emotion of worry drive her decision.

Katie, on the other hand, is depicted as a progressive woman. Jean applauds Katie for not fitting the norm of a traditional woman as such: ‘Of course there were times when [Jean] was worried. That Katie would never get a decent job. Or fall pregnant by accident. Or never find a husband [...] but Jean liked the fact that she’d brought such a free spirit into the world’ (182). The conventional script of marriage and motherhood is shown to be prevailing still, but as Jean notes herself ‘she might have been more like Katie had she been born thirty years later’ (182). The attention the narrator brings to the generational gap between parent and child highlights how the restrictions of gender are fluid in that the rules are dictated by the time of their production: ‘all knowledge is situated, derived from a specific context which affords a particular angle on reality’ (Bradley, *Fractured Identities* 115).

Feminine behaviour and female possibility, consequently, are influenced by the temporal setting. Katie notices her parents’ issues with adapting to the changes of socio-cultural values when she observes ‘[...] how often parents did it. Translating every worry into a worry about something not being done properly’ (283). Katie, who is also a parent, is shown to be careless about doing things ‘properly’, so the observation she makes about parenting and worrying about such matters highlights the generational difference in what people worry about. The emphasis on ‘worry about something not being done properly’ (283) demonstrates that the object of worry is influenced by age: the options one has are dictated by generational understandings of propriety.

The nature of Katie’s relationship to Ray, furthermore, is implied to be mostly systematic at the start; ‘‘Jacob loves him. And I love him.’ That was the wrong way around, somehow’ (70). Katie’s thoughts emphasise that she feels that her own feelings towards Ray should be prioritised before those of her son. Yet, systematically, Katie seems to feel that the advantages for her son are more important. Throughout the text, Katie’s response to her worries about marrying Ray lean towards a systematic approach, as she constantly weighs the benefits and drawbacks of the marriage.

Katie ultimately decides to go through with the wedding, which can be considered to be an emotional (and thus more feminine) response. However, before the wedding, she gets her hair cut off: ‘she thought, Why not? New life. New hair. And went and had most of it removed. Boyish. [...] The person in the mirror was no longer simply the mother of a small child. The person in the

mirror was a woman in charge of her own destiny. Mum was horrified' (283).<sup>2</sup> Thus, after conforming to the more traditionally feminine act of marrying the man she loves, Katie is shown to not fully conform to the norms of femininity by changing her outward appearance to look more 'boyish'. Jean's response to this radical act further highlights Jean's more conventional ideas about femininity.

The text in this case shows the rigorousness of the archetypal gender divisions in contemporary family settings, as women seem to be expected to worry about different things than men. Cecilia Ridgeway calls this organisation the 'schema of family devotion' (129). She argues that '[w]hen women enter into a heterosexual family relationship, [...] and especially when they have children, the more intense and essentialised version of the female stereotype that is represented in the schema of family devotion is evoked by them and for others (129). Katie's acts of outwardly defying the stereotypical expectations of a wedding, e.g. 'Katie said she didn't do frocks' (27) and cutting her hair in a 'boyish' way (283), imply that she can be viewed as a progressive woman. However, it is simultaneously implied that if a woman has both systematic and empathetic qualities, her outward appearance should reflect that her identity is neither completely feminine nor masculine. Thus, different types of behaviour are still attributed to different genders and in this way, the progressiveness still reverts to classical notions of gender.

In *RH* Richard is shown to be worried mostly about maintaining his status as an alpha male: the passages where he appears worried are when he feels threatened by his nephew Alex whom Richard considers a younger alpha male. The power struggle between the two characters is constantly emphasised. When Alex discusses what he wants to study at university, for example, the narrator says that 'Richard finds it reassuring [...] it made Alex seem like a boy again' (194). The text insinuates that Alex, too, feels worried about Richard's threat to his own masculinity: 'Richard the doctor, the uncle, the admirable man. Fixed landscape turning into ebb and flow' (213). The use of wave imagery in the context of the previous passage about 'ebb and flow' (206) signifies that Alex is worried about the dynamic.

Richard's responses to the worry concerning his masculine assertiveness are systematic and consist of acts that prove his own masculinity. For example, Richard decides to go on long runs because Alex does so: '[Richard] would jog up the road, walk the steepest part of the hill [...]

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<sup>2</sup> In a later edition of the text, this sentence has been changed into '... no longer simply a wife and a mother', which emphasises that Katie is distancing herself from not just one but two gendered roles.

conserve his energy this time instead of wasting it in a private show of failed machismo' (222). Richard's thoughts demonstrate how his behaviour is directed by his worry that he is not appearing masculine enough. The rhetoric also points to the performativity of masculinity by using diction such as 'private show' and 'failed machismo'. Richard feels that his masculine status needs to be reinstated through physical acts, and his need to prove his masculinity points to the fact that he is worried about not appearing masculine enough as it is.

After Richard failed to return home from his run, the narrator reports that '[Alex] wants it publicly acknowledged that he is the expert when it comes to running and walking these hills. He wants it publicly acknowledged that Richard was pretending to be twenty years old and that he has made a fucking tit of himself in the process' (231). Alex is thus shown to be aware that Richard is trying to assert dominance, but due to Alex's systematic response, he fails to show any worry or empathy when Richard is missing. Rather, Alex sees it as an opportunity to reinstate his own masculine dominance. Alex's lack of worry about Richard's disappearance is due to masculine rivalry and therefore reinstates how worry and gender are related concepts.

Alex's masculinity is emphasised through his portrayal as being very pragmatic and systematic: 'Lots of kids thought he was boring. He couldn't give a fuck. If you didn't earn money you were screwed' (23). Alex's pragmatism causes his worry-response to be the most systematic and thus masculine of all: 'He climbed the stile and began the long haul to Red Darren, his mind shrinking with the effort and the altitude, this precious trick he had learnt, doubts and worries falling away at four, five, six miles, the fretting self reduced to almost nothing' (*RH* 52). However, as opposed to Richard, Alex's motivation for running is to help himself and is not determined by his need to assert his masculine dominance. Alex runs to clear his mind, whereas Richard's motivation to run is driven by the worry of the status of his masculinity, or as Melissa formulates it, to '[*show*] off about how manly he is [sic]' (230).

Another source of worry for Richard is found in a sub-plot outside of the narrative. Richard is involved in a legal issue because one of his patients has, through incorrect treatment, ended up in a wheelchair. This event seems to cause Richard to worry (to which Dominic says, '*I cannot imagine Richard worrying* [sic]' (82)) because it shows the flaws to his systematic approach. Even this worry, then, can be said to relate back to concepts of masculinity: if manliness is related to being systematic and pragmatic, a failure in the right systematic approach dents Richard's masculinity.

A similar statement is made about Alex when Daisy says that ‘she was amazed to realise that there was a person in there who thought and felt’ (32). The most overt masculine characters of the texts (Alex and Richard) are shown to possess the outward display of self-control that is conventionally related to the ideal of masculinity (Seidler 80), but the focalised passages from both Richard and Alex show that they, too, are worried about matters. The fact that they do not display this worry more publicly, then, is dependent on the perpetuation of male self-control to maintain a masculine image.

Dominic worries about the extramarital affair he is having with Amy, which may be a consequence of his regret about the lives he did not lead (*RH* 5). Another prominent aspect of Dominic’s character is outperforming Angela as the ‘better parent’: ‘if he never told [Angela] about Amy then he would always be the better parent [...] because he loved Daisy unreservedly’ (143). Even though Dominic’s way of thinking implies that he can be the better parent because of the outward empathy he possesses and which Angela seems to lack, the way he demonstrates that he is the better parent still relies on a systematic approach.

The contrast between Dominic’s outward expression of empathy and Richard’s clinical detachment can be attributed to the fact that Dominic is shown as less of an alpha male. This difference in masculine status is also evident in their contrasting professions. Richard is a doctor whereas Dominic works part time at Waterstone’s after an emotional breakdown (29). The text emphasises this perceived difference as a matter of masculinity: ‘Richard found it hard to comprehend anyone embarking upon a career without aiming for the top. Which applied to Angela as well, though she was a woman with children, which was different’ (29). Richard thus emphasises the difference in expectation by critiquing Dominic for not aiming at the top while simultaneously excusing Angela because she is ‘a woman with children’.

This remark also shows that Richard’s ideologies are tied to the notion of men being agentic and women being communal (Ridgway 152) and the idea that motherhood is women’s natural vocation. Dominic does not seem to mind that professionally, he has an inferior position to Angela, which further emphasises the contrast between Dominic’s, Richard’s, and Alex’s masculinity. Harriet Bradley argues that in the twenty-first century, ‘the male breadwinner discourse [...] still holds strong’ (*Gender* 106). Thus, not only is Richard’s viewpoint depicted as working through a framework of traditional gendered stereotypes, he also systematically establishes Dominic’s “inferior” position in the text.

Angela's worries are primarily triggered by the upcoming eighteen-year anniversary of the miscarriage of her first child Karen. Karen's name is mentioned thirty-eight times throughout the novel. Angela's preoccupation with her stillborn child is explained within the narrative when she thinks back to the moment when she found out that Karen would have genetic deformities: 'Her body knew something was wrong but she was going to be a good mother and a good mother would never reject a child' (102). Angela's concern about not being able to successfully bear a child can be traced back to her feelings that being a mother defines her and her femininity. The fact that she has had a miscarriage would be a public display of "failed femininity".

Angela says that '*it didn't used to bother me. Then all of a sudden ... [sic] She sits up and gives a little shake, as if trying to throw off this passing strangeness*' (299). The narrative emphasises the 'passing' quality of Angela's troubles, which points to the notion that the emotion she experiences is worry. The fact that Angela suddenly becomes occupied with her stillborn child in the setting of the novel is explained early on when she thinks about what 'she hated about the countryside, no distraction from the dirty messed-up workings of the heart' (11). Angela is the breadwinner of her family, and due to the inversion of the traditional gender roles, she is usually able to maintain a level of distance from her family and her emotions through the distractions of work.

In addition, the reconciliation with Richard brings up memories of their mother who failed to "properly" fulfil the maternal role. The text does not outwardly state that their mother was particularly problematic, but it is insinuated when it is stated that '[Richard] regularly cooked for his mother, put her to bed, bathed her sometimes, and the more intimate the task the more she resented the intrusion. At least when she lashed out she was drunk and uncoordinated' (106). It is similarly said about their father that '*he didn't care much about other people. I'm saying he didn't know how to deal with children [sic]*' (269). There is the insinuation that both Angela and Richard are currently situated in a troubled family dynamic because of the unstable family they come from, showing the influence of the perpetuation of damaging family patterns.

Angela is simultaneously worried about her dysfunctional marriage; she experiences her marriage as 'being back on duty' (121). The sudden realisation of the consequences of her own troubled relationship with her parents also contributes to her feelings of worry, because they must '[rebuild] the family now the troublesome parents had been removed' (69). On the way to the holiday cottage, Angela thinks about her mother's passing, and the narrator states that 'her death

should have been a relief. Then the first spade hit the coffin, a bubble rose in her chest and she realised her mother had been ... what? A cornerstone? A breakwater?’ (4). The narrator employs a water reference through the image of a bubble.

Angela likens her mother to ‘a breakwater’, which in its literal meaning is defined as ‘anything that breaks the force of the waves at a particular place’ (OED). In the context of the narrative’s use of water metaphors in the narrative, the image of a mother as breakwater is notable because it suggests that the presence of Angela’s mother was able to keep her worries at bay – breaking the force of waves. Angela now feels destabilised because her response to her mother’s death is different from what she had expected it to be. The instability Angela experiences is moreover emphasised by the similes being followed with question marks.

Angela is shown to respond to all these matters in an overly emotional way: ‘[Louisa] flipped the light to find Angela standing beside the fridge, eating a bowl of Frosties, an open bag of caster sugar on the chopping board. [...] *Comfort eating*, said Angela [sic]’ (173). The OED defines ‘comfort’ as ‘relief from mental distress’. Angela finds relief from her worries through a bodily function, thus evading the problem in a way not dissimilar to that of George. Angela’s habit of comfort eating displays a lack of self-control, which strengthens the image of men being in control of themselves and their feelings while women are not.

The fact that Angela indulges in gluttony also shows that now that she is a mother, she does not need to worry about her appearance as much anymore. Dominic even thinks about how ‘she disgusted him now, the size and sag of her, the veins on her calves, almost a grandmother’ (5). When Dominic thus likens Angela to a grandmother he still casts her in a maternal role but also establishes the disconnection of Angela as his wife and the mother of his children. For Dominic, Angela’s lack of care for her appearance desexualises her to the point where she becomes an image of a woman who is past the time of fertility. In line with de Beauvoir’s argument, thus, Dominic does not consider his wife to be feminine anymore.

Most of Louisa’s worries are portrayed as primarily empathetic: ‘[Richard] didn’t think of Louisa as someone who had done anything of great significance, either good or bad, rather as someone who had put herself at the service of others so that they could do their things of significance’ (153). Worry is also expressed by Louisa in relation to her sexual past and the implication this has for her marriage to Richard.

Louisa’s character seems to be that of the traditional, compliant female, yet she states that,



*'I am a woman with a past [...] Richard would prefer that I was a blushing bride [sic]'* (204). Her status as a divorcée is not a point of attention in the novel, and the only time Richard comments upon her sexual past is when the narrator states that *'He felt disturbed, too, by the thought that these men had been, what? More adventurous? Rougher? More masculine?'* (158). Richard's worries about his own masculine identity instead of the implications of Louisa's feelings emphasises Louisa's importance in a communal sense and diminishes the importance of her own individual identity.

The fact that Louisa's sexual past is one of her primary worries insinuates that Louisa is worried about how she is perceived by others. Her actions are thus partly determined by worries about social normativity: *'she could feel the pull of a world in which you didn't have to think constantly of how others saw you'* (17). Richard thinks about Louisa that *'she wanted to make other people happy'* and wonders if that was *'part of the problem, pleasing other men'* (158). The context and syntactical order in which Richard wonders this, which is in the same passage where he contemplates Louisa's sexual past as a threat to his masculinity, insinuates that this is a rhetorical question: pleasing other men is not part of the problem but part of her draw.

Louisa is portrayed as the most feminine character of the novel, which is established through her empathetic qualities. Physically, also, Louisa is described as feminine; Dominic observes that she has *'big hips but firm, something Nordic about her, comfortable in a way [Richard's ex-wife] had never been'* (18), and Angela thinks there's *'something footballer's wife about Louisa. Angela couldn't picture her going to the theatre or reading a serious book'* (8). Richard even states that the problem he had with his ex-wife is that *'she didn't really care about other human beings [sic]'* (128), implying that Louisa is superior because she does.

Louisa's character is almost entirely framed in the light of nurture and care; Richard states that *'I didn't really understand what family meant till I met Louisa [sic]'* (128). She is thus tied mostly to the roles of wife and mother. Since she is Richard's second wife (with a child from a previous marriage), her function in the story seems mostly to be a contrast to Richard's unmaternal first wife. It could be argued that the emphasis on Louisa's worries driven by empathy illustrates the contrast between a successful wife and an unsuccessful wife.

Melissa, Louisa's daughter, on the other hand, is shown to be very manipulative and can therefore be said to have a systemised worry-response. Her physical appearance is determined by her worry of blending into the crowd (*RH* 147). Melissa's response to Daisy's attempt to kiss her

revolves back to worries about the nature of her own response instead of empathy towards Daisy. Moreover, the narrator overtly emphasises the performative quality of Melissa's personality: *'I'm just worried about her, that's all. [sic] Regaining her balance after being wrong-footed'* (266). Melissa's use of the word 'worry' is performative in the sense that it is not derived from genuine empathy but rather to maintain the perception of being empathetic.

Melissa's position as an unconventional woman is emphasised in the text by saying that 'in many respects she was like her father. Not the dirt under his nails, [...] but the way his sense of self depended so much on other people being in the wrong' (127). Melissa's thoughts echo an earlier thought of Angela's, who thinks that 'so much of one's self depended on the green vase and the rotary washing line' (109)<sup>3</sup>. It is notable that Angela's sense of self depends on domestic objects, whereas Melissa's identity relies on the confirmation that she is more cunning than those around her.

For these reasons, it can be established that in the two texts discussed here, the response to worry is directed by the gendered notion that females tend to empathise, and males tend to systemise. However, characters such as Melissa and Katie serve as examples to show that this notion is somewhat archaic due to their ability to break the traditional empathise-sympathise pattern. Worry becomes triggered by different objects. These objects are dependent upon one's gender; women are cast to worry either about others or about not being able to successfully fulfil the gendered role of wife and mother.

In addition, the objects of the characters' worries within the text tend to be recurring as they "lead" the fabula – George's storyline revolves around his self-involved worries about death, Katie's storyline revolves around the quandaries of her upcoming wedding, Richard's storyline revolves around the worry of retaining his position as the alpha male, and Dominic's passages centre on his worries of past decisions and 'all those other lives' that he never got to lead (5). The repetitions of these worries can thus be considered to fit the frame of gender performativity: worries are a repeated habit of reinstating concerns that are derived from femininity and masculinity.

The difference in worry-response in male and female characters is also evident in the family dynamics as they are represented in the text. The worry that is represented in the family setting of the novel has two functions. First, the way males and females worry is derived from the traditional

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<sup>3</sup> Both remarks, simultaneously, seem to echo William Carlos Williams's 'The Red Wheelbarrow' (1923)

organisation of the family. Second, because family relies on contact and communication, worry can become a communal tool to form a bond between people (as worry can be derived from the notion of nurture and care and noticeable changed behavioural patterns).

The word ‘worry’ in Haddon’s texts is almost exclusively mentioned in the context of relational dynamics. In *Gender and Domestic Life* (2004), Tony Chapman introduces a table with domestic practices where he portrays the different tasks that make up family life (21).<sup>4</sup> The last entry in the table is labelled ‘caring’, which is defined as ‘doing emotion work within households to maintain/nurture relationship with partner, children, extended family, colleagues, friends, neighbours; *worrying* about older children, [...] grandchildren/great-grandchildren etc.’ (21, emphasis added). The primary texts delegate the tasks of caring almost exclusively to maternal characters; Jean, Katie, Louisa, and to a lesser extent Angela, are the characters shown to worry about maintaining family dynamics.

According to Stuart Aitken, a disturbance in habitual patterns leads to gender performativity in a family setting becoming apparent (120). There are instances in both novels where family as a concept relies on performing: ‘They *acted* like a real family. Perhaps it was what most people did’ (*RH* 58, emphasis added) and ‘Neither of them had the energy to argue and they spent the next few days *playing the role of dutiful parents* so as not to trouble Jacob. And she could see them slowly turning into the people they were *pretending to be*’ (*SoB* 243, emphasis added). The performed and cultivated nature of family organisations becomes evident when these repetitious acts are disturbed, disabled, or challenged. The example from *RH* comes from Dominic’s thought report when he is becoming increasingly aware of the dysfunctionality of his family. The example from *SoB* refers to Katie when she and Ray get back together after a temporary split, which is a situation in which they need to re-establish family dynamics.

An arbitrary intertextual passage in *RH* captures the thematic approach to family that both novels employ: ‘family, that slippery word [...] everyone sailing under a different sky’ (10). The statement implies both the unity and individuality in family; it can be read as meaning either every family sailing under a different sky, or everyone within a family sailing under a different sky. The first reading implements the idea that no family is alike, pointing to the instability of a family. The instability is further enhanced by the (water) imagery of sailing; had the image been a “smooth ride”, for example, the image of families would have been more stable. The connection to water

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<sup>4</sup> Table 2.1 *defining domestic practices*

in the metaphor also links the idea of family to worry in the context of water imagery. The second reading implements the theme of alienation between the family members; the lack of communality is enhanced by the image of ‘a different sky’, implying that none of the family members exist within the same realm.

The texts contain four different types of family: George and Jean Hall, the traditional couple with grown children; Richard, who has become a stepfather to a teenage daughter through his marriage with Louisa; Angela and Dominic, who have an unconventional ‘schema of family devotion’ (Ridgway 129); and finally Katie, the young divorcée with a small child who is about to enter her second marriage. The different familial situations demonstrate the various limitations of the gendered family framework in various ways and show the rigorousness of the notions of what the male- and female characters should be worried about.

In *SoB*, George starts worrying about his familial relations once his retirement starts, because it is the first time that he is directly confronted with his family life without being offered an escape. The Western masculine identity focuses on the male as “the breadwinner” of the family, and to fulfil this role, men have been able to maintain distance from the organisation of the family. Stephen Whitehead argues that ‘there is comfort in this act, for so long as the man sustains his undivided attention on work he is avoiding looking into his life and values’ (128). In the second chapter of the novel, we are told that ‘The secret of contentment, George felt, lay in ignoring many things completely’ (4). However, it rapidly becomes evident that George’s way of ignoring things completely is to divert his focus on another object, which is the lesion on his thigh. It is thus shown that the tendency to be detached from the family is ingrained in George’s character.

George’s detachment from family life is explained when he has an uncomfortable interaction with his grandson Jacob. The narrator says that George has always felt uncomfortable around small children, but that this was never a problem for him when he was employed: ‘It did not matter when Jamie and Katie were very young. Fathers were not meant to play Peep-Bo or put their hands up a sock and be Mr Snaky-Snake. [...] You built a tree-house, administered justice and took control of the kite in strong winds. And that was it’ (23). George has always adhered to the pattern of the distant father without challenging the notion.

The narrator makes occasional remarks about George’s relation to his own father who was distant and very strict in his masculine ideals, which is shown to be influential in the way George approaches his own family. The notion of the distant father is emphasised through the rhetoric of

‘fathers were not meant to’ and taking ‘control of the kite in strong winds’, focusing on the aspect of male strength and indicating that the distance of a father is dictated by the societal gendered framework of family involvement. Moreover, ‘fathers were not meant to’ signifies that George seems to want to adhere to the societal dictations of a father’s involvement. George is shown to be extremely conscious of judgment from others – the narrator states, for example, that George does not like to go to hotels because he is unsure of how much he is expected to tip (115).

Male characters are generally shown to maintain distance with their families due to work commitments, whereas the female characters are expected to be more involved. Due to the archetypal image of a woman as primarily wife and mother, it seems almost unnatural for men to worry about familial relations. Now that George is forced to be involved with his family life due to his retirement, he declares that he wants ‘to maintain a Buddhist detachment’ (60) from the worries Jamie and Jean share about Katie’s future wedding. He thus directs his worries to a rash on his thigh; in this way, he can worry about himself, and the male distance from the family is perpetuated through George’s engagement in other activities.

Ray, Katie’s fiancé, is shown in contrast to George to take on the position of an involved father for Katie’s child, and can therefore be said to be portrayed as a positive father figure. Even though the primary topic of the worries in the novel is Katie’s marriage to Ray, which George refers to as ‘a reckless and inadvisable marriage’ (61), everyone agrees that Ray will be good for Jacob. In an exchange about the wedding, the Hall family discusses their concerns: ‘I’m just worried about Katie,’ said Jamie. ‘We’re all worried about Katie,’ said Jean [...] ‘Ray wouldn’t be my first choice, either. But there you go. Your sister’s a woman who knows her own mind’ (61). Their primary worries are that Katie has the wrong motives in marrying Ray. She is a single mother, and Ray can help to take care of her child, so Katie therefore feels that marriage is a logical next step. Jean says that there is no point in worrying about Katie’s relationship because it is implied that it is Katie’s own decision. It is arguably the doubts of Katie’s family that push her towards a place of worry about this decision though. One family member being worried about something can thus direct the worry of other family members.

Katie’s family looks down on Katie and Ray’s relationship because she is more educated, but they support her decision to get married in the end. Their support signifies that her duties as a mother are prioritised over her personal development. In this way the novel reflects the changing domestic sphere but also portrays the difficulty of breaking away from old patterns. Katie has the

possibility to find a father for her child who is not the biological father, and while this is accepted by society, this possibility simultaneously makes her worried about her motivations for the marriage.

In *RH*, Angela sustains the family through her full-time job as teacher, making her the breadwinner. Her superior position to Dominic in the agentic role is criticised by Richard (29) but only from the viewpoint that it diminishes Dominic's masculinity. Dominic and Angela's family dynamic is also portrayed as unconventional because of Angela maintaining a distance from the family: 'She thought of herself as someone who cared, but she spent all of that concern at school' (160). Despite the inversion of the fulfilment of traditional roles in the family's organisation, their responsibilities are still measured against the parameters of gendered expectations. Alex notes, for example, that 'he recognised nothing of himself in Mum and Dad, her distractedness, the lack of care she took of herself, his father sitting around the house feeling sorry for himself, doing the cleaning and shopping [...] like it was the most natural thing in the world' (55).

The inefficiency of the unconventional family organisation can be explained through the persisting notions of the male breadwinner when Angela thinks about

Big men, strong men, flawed but honourable, men you can rely on when the chips are down, this righteous anger they keep to hand, like a holstered weapon, ready to use as a last resort. The opposite of Dominic. All those presumptions you carry with you your whole life, about what a family should be. What a husband should be. What a father should be. (246)

The rhetoric that is used in this passage signifies the traditional stratification of family organisation through conditional verbs such as 'should'. The use of these verbs highlights how archaic notions of gendered stereotypes of family organisation persist and how they influence the situation even when the traditional organisation is not followed. Moreover, the text demonstrates that Dominic is worried about being the caregiver, because 'he has never really solved a problem in his life, he has simply averted his eyes and left other people to do the dirty work' (229). His desire to be a better parent relies on the confirmation of being wanted, as a consummation of his masculine identity: 'Dominic expected more from having a son. That oedipal rage between two and four. *Stop hugging Mummy* [sic]' (11).

When Dominic is unsuccessful in helping Daisy with her troubles about her sexuality, he thinks that 'Angela was having the conversation with Daisy that he *should* have had. What did he feel? Thankful that it was now Angela's problem? Aggrieved at his exclusion?' (243). The consequences of not having been able to console Daisy cause him to worry about his own

emotional stance in the matter, which is not empathic in the slightest. Even though Dominic is portrayed as an involved father initially, his motives subsequently reveal that his primary concern in the familial dynamic is his own position, and he is relieved that Angela can fulfil the role of nurture and care. However, the father is traditionally agentic in the family, and in order to be agentic, one needs to be involved. Dominic's aggravation about being excluded thus reverts back to notions of masculinity.

Richard, in contrast, has recently remarried and gained a stepdaughter, but because Richard does not have his own children, his primary familial worry relates back to his sister and his parents. It could be argued that the reason Richard has never been able to build a stable family is a repetition of his own family origins. The unstable family organisation is perpetuated because Richard repeats (albeit in a different form) the act of creating an unconventional, unstable family environment for himself. He starts to worry about family life from the moment he reconciles with Angela; their reconciliation brings up memories of their past. It is the direct contrast created by the reconciliation of Angela's family and Richard's own that sparks worries that he might be repeating a pattern.

In line with the hypothesis that male characters worry about their individual masculine identity, and female characters worry about the relational dynamics, Richard's worries are directed inwardly. Once he is confronted with the problematic family in which he was raised, he regrets never having his own children: 'He wondered if he, too, had been damaged, by their father dying, by their mother drinking. He thought of himself as having put it all behind him, but his decision to marry someone who kept her distance, his failure to have children, his lack of interest in his own interior landscape ...' (284).

Worry also functions to create a communal bond in a relational dynamic. *A Spot of Bother* contains collective worry related to Katie's wedding. In *RH*, Richard's failure to return after his run occupies a large part of the narrative because each family member in turn functions as focaliser in passages that detail that their worry. Even though Melissa, Alex, and Daisy all state that they are not worried about Richard, the looming concern that there is a possibility he might be missing leads them to gather together.

Melissa, who is characterised by her manipulative abilities, contrastingly plays into the way worry can lead to the realisation that not enough nurture or care is given by the parent. Melissa feels overlooked and consequently runs away, an act to which the family collectively responds: 'everyone had gathered in the dining room. The scene struck Richard as a little over-dramatic. [...]

*She'll be sitting in a café somewhere, enjoying the fact that we're panicking. [...] She'll let us worry for a while [sic]' (107). Again, this shows Richard's systematic approach to worry: 'professional habit. Considerer all possibilities' (107). Yet, the worry about the possible outcome is what ultimately brings the family together.*

The contextualisation of worry and gender demonstrates how the experience is influenced by the rigid boundaries of gendered expectations. Because the relational setting of the novels is the family, the analysis demonstrates how the worries of the women in the text are primarily directed towards family matters. The analysis demonstrates that Haddon's novels, despite portraying unconventional family settings, still rely upon classical family schemas. In addition, the gendered domestic sphere emphasises the dominance of men, while simultaneously, the men are distant from their family because their primary worry seems to be the need to reinstate their masculinity through personal acts. The female characters, on the other hand, are shown to be put in the position as wives and mothers, thus consistently being placed in a relational dynamic. The perpetual acts of reinstating femininity are measured by their success in those roles.



## Conclusion

The significance of the representation of worry in Mark Haddon's *SoB* and *RH* is argued to be tied to the construction of the narratives and has been analysed through gender theory. Worry, this thesis argues, is derived from the contemplation of possibilities in the future as well as questions of "what if" in relation to the past. Stability, too, is a vital element in the concept of worry. If instability is experienced, it means that there is not one fixed outcome but several, which sparks the contemplation of various possibilities. The significance of worry in the primary texts can be demonstrated on two levels, which uncover the two different functions that worry has in the two novels.

The first level is the narratological structure; analysing the narrative with a focus on the concept of worry reveals the influence worry has on the progression of the story. The presence of worry can be explained through the way the narrative is constructed. The presence of worry can also contribute to an understanding of the sequence of events in a narrative text. In the case of *SoB* and *RH*, very little confrontation seems to happen between the characters. The lack of confrontation is influential in the character's experience of worry, because the characters remain stuck in the realm of "what ifs". The lack of confrontation is simultaneously a result of worrying, because the lack of confrontation means that there is never a realisation of the possible outcome the characters worry about.

The second level is contextualising the worry that is represented. On this level, worry can serve as an indexical tool to analyse gender boundaries in the text. When the represented worry in the text is contextualised, it reveals implementations of gender boundaries and archaic gender expectations. I propose that the visibility of the unstable nature of gender contributes to feelings of worry as well as the idea that worry can be directed through gendered expectations. Worry exposes the instabilities of gendered identity in cases where the instability is not explicitly portrayed or foregrounded in literary texts.

For the male characters, the connection between worry and gender is related to reinstatements of masculinity. For the female characters, worry is related to relational dynamics: their femininity is reinstated by perpetuating acts that display their nurturing and caring qualities. This thesis demonstrates how worry in the context of gender theory can contribute to further emphasise and support the performed nature of gender. In addition, focusing on explicitly expressed worry in the primary texts reveals how the families in Haddon's stories still, to various

extents, comply to stereotypical gendered practices in a way that is not overtly displayed. Worry, in the gendered familial context, then becomes a habit that is shown to extend to the next generation.

Because worry is portrayed in Haddon's texts as 'just part of the human condition' (Haddon, *RH* 185), its importance in literary studies has not been claimed or noted to any great extent. Francis O'Gorman is the only literary critic to have concerned himself with the occurrence of specific everyday worrying in literary works, but his focus remains limited to the Modernist period. The thesis establishes and demonstrates that there is a gravity in worry, both in understanding the narratological structure and because the moments where worry occurs expose the restraint of gendered norms and gendered domestic practices. The analysis of the primary texts in this thesis show the significance of worry; the representation of worry in a literary text can be used to analyse the narrative structure and uncover socially constructed patterns that influence and direct the lives of its characters.

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