



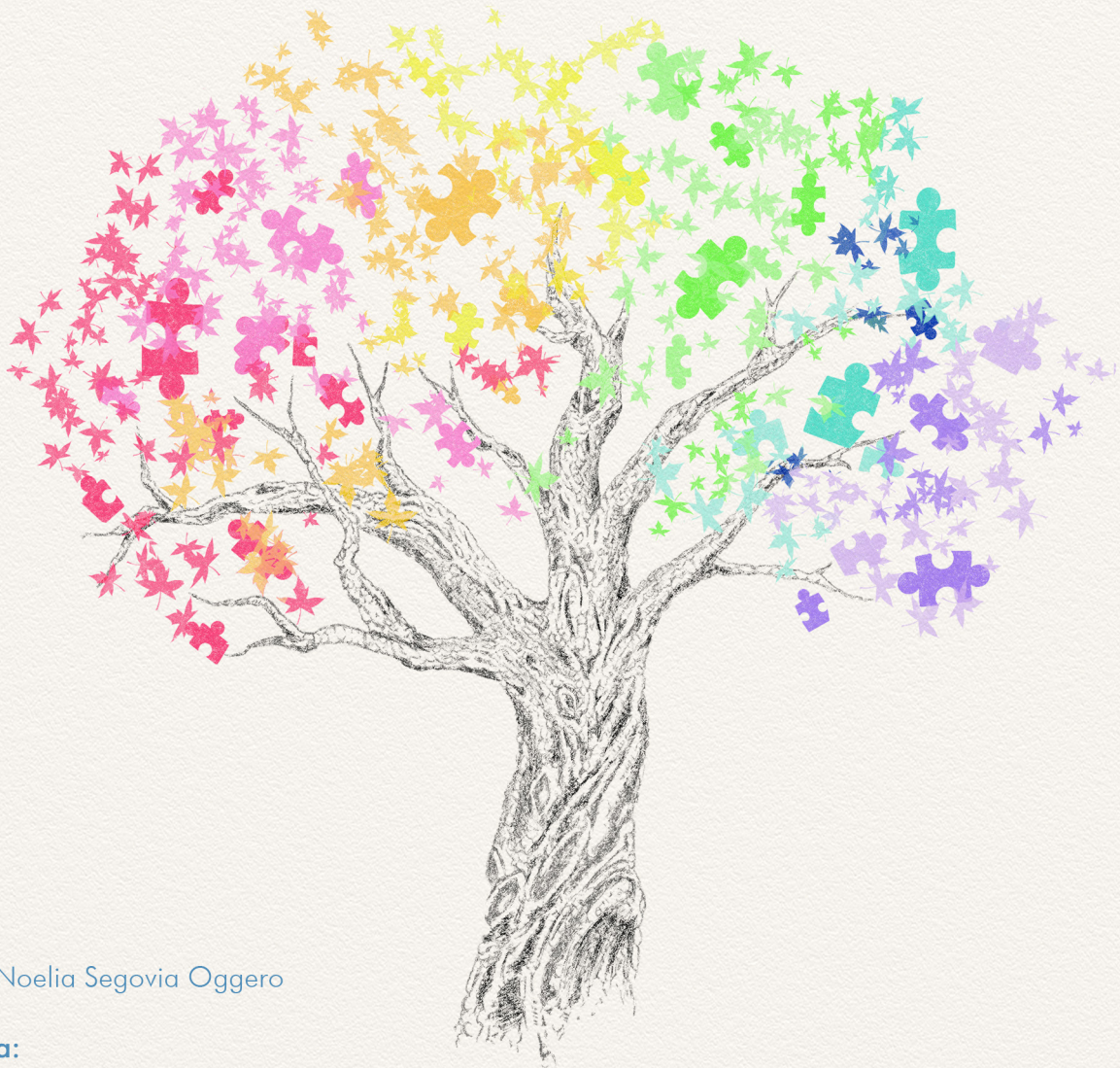
UNC

Trabajo Final de la Licenciatura en Lengua y Literatura Inglesa



Asperger's Syndrome in Mark Haddon's Novel

The Curious Case of the Dog in the Night-time
and Alis Rowe's Autobiography
The Girl with the Curly Hair:
Different Genres, Different Representations



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Introduction

Since the end of the 19th century and throughout the 20th century, writers such as Charles Baudelaire, William Faulkner, Allen Ginsberg and Toni Morrison provided those who were considered outcasts with a voice. They introduced in their works the accounts of those who were excluded or hidden so that society could become aware of their existence and their experiences. Their works encouraged changes in the way individuals look at and understand each other, which enabled those who were considered “different” to claim their right to be seen and heard. People learnt about people.

This inclusive process is still taking place in the 21st century. Some of those excluded people who were empowered were individuals suffering from Asperger’s syndrome. They are part of a minority which recently began to be comprehended. After discovering their voice, they started to express and share their lives with others through different genres. At the same time, writers got interested in their experiences and started to portray them in their literary works.

In this final research study, Mark Haddon’s novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and Alis Rowe’s autobiography *The Girl with the Curly Hair* are explored and analysed to establish how Asperger’s syndrome is represented in contemporary literature.

Haddon’s novel tells the story of Christopher, a teenage boy who suffers from Asperger’s syndrome, and his journey to discover who killed his neighbour’s dog. He goes through many important events that lead him not only to solve the murder, but also to accept his parents’ divorce and learn how to deal with his psychopathology. As for Rowe’s autobiography, it is a recount of different events in her life that helped her to realize that she suffers from Asperger’s syndrome and how she learnt to live with it. Descriptions and explanations of a number of everyday situations that are comprehended differently by people on the Autism spectrum are included in Alis’ autobiography.

For the sake of this analysis, only three characteristics of individuals suffering from this syndrome are taken into account: the inability to understand and use metaphors, the logical and visual way of understanding the world and the lack of comprehension of *neurotypicals*¹ emotions and interests. The representations of these aspects have been identified in each of the works, and, afterwards, they have been compared and contrasted considering the differences in genre of the two literary texts and the differences that exist between the two texts that are related to text producers.

The following questions are answered in this final research study: How are Asperger's syndrome characteristics –i.e., the inability to understand and use metaphors, the logical and visual way of understanding the world and the lack of comprehension of other people's emotions and interests– represented in Mark Haddon's novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and in Alis Rowe's autobiography *The Girl with the Curly Hair*? How do the characteristics of each genre influence the representation of the Asperger's syndrome's attributes mentioned above? How do text producers influence the representation of the previously mentioned Asperger's syndrome's attributes? How do these attributes' representations differ in an autobiography and in a novel?

Literature Review

Asperger's syndrome has already been explored within the field of literature. Brown (Waltz, Researchgate) sustains that well-known writers, such as Emily Dickinson or Henry David Thoreau show traits of the syndrome in their literary works. In fact, she suggests their writing styles share some characteristics that may be associated with Asperger's syndrome and that those characteristics are considered to be the reason of their success and their uniqueness

¹ People who do not suffer the syndrome are called “neurotypicals” by those who do have the syndrome.

as writers (Waltz, Researchgate)². The inclusion of characters suffering from this syndrome in a fictional work and its influence on the writer's narrative style has also been explored by literary critics. According to Freissman (395), portraying an individual with Asperger's syndrome requires an adjustment of the writer's view of the world. That is to say, the writer needs to make his mind work following the same lines of thought that those followed by people who suffer from the syndrome. This is not an easy task and, if it is not done properly, Asperger's syndrome representation may be imprecise (395). The popularity of novels including individuals with Asperger's syndrome as main characters or narrators has been studied by Greenwell (271). He explains that greater interest has been shown in those literary works in which the individual with the syndrome is the narrator, since the accounts are made in first person and not observed from the outside (Greenwell 272). The syndrome has also been explored in connection with talent. Happe and Frith (2009) suggest that these people are creative in a structured and unique way because of their particular interests and the workings of their minds. They are gifted artists, but their endowments differ from those of a *neurotypical* (Happe and Frith 1345). Those suffering from Asperger's syndrome do not find it easy to imagine objects that do not exist or situations that did not happen or will never happen. This is one of the reasons why their talent is different from that of *neurotypicals*. Their creativity is restricted to reality (Craig and Baron-Cohen 323).

Impact of the Research Paper

Most of the existing studies on Asperger's syndrome belong to the field of medical studies. In literature, this syndrome and its representation have not been thoroughly explored, which makes this research relevant and innovative. The significance of this research lies also on the fact that Asperger's syndrome's representations in two genres, the autobiography and the

² According to *MLA Handbook* (8th Edition), in order to quote an electronic source without page numbers or fixed positions you must "include in the text or in a parenthesis enough information for the reader to find the corresponding entry" (388). That is why, the name of the author and the webpage from which it was downloaded have been included.

novel, and from the point of view of two different writers are not only studied, but also compared and contrasted. In other words, the representation of the syndrome in each of the literary works is examined taking into account how the characteristics of each genre and their texts producers may or may not influence the syndrome's representation. Last but not least, in Argentina, no study has been done as regards Asperger's syndrome in literature which contributes to making this investigation academically valuable.

Theoretical Framework

According to the fourth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM IV), Asperger's syndrome is a pervasive developmental disorder characterized by "severe and sustained impairment in social interaction" (75). Individuals suffering from this disorder cannot spontaneously relate with people nor display and understand nonverbal language. This means that they also lack "emotional reciprocity" (75). Apart from this, they are unable to comprehend *neurotypicals*, their interests and their activities because they develop "restricted, repetitive patterns of behaviour, interests and activities" (75) that are not common for *neurotypicals*. Nevertheless, they develop linguistic skills normally, and "show no clinically significant delays in cognitive development of age-appropriate self-help skills, adaptive behaviour (...) and curiosity about the environment" (75). Despite linguistic development not being disturbed, they are highly logical and literal in their speech. The use of metaphors for them makes no sense. Neither their literary nor their cognitive use is intelligible to people on the spectrum. This is mainly due to the fact that their thinking is made through real images. They tend to have problems understanding what they cannot see, which, according to Craig and Baron-Cohen (1999), also limits their creativity and hinders imagination. According to the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM V), this developmental disorder has been included within the Autism Spectrum Disorder since 2013 (51).

A genre is a construct of “relatively stable types of utterances” that share “thematic content, style and compositional structure” (Bakhtin, “Problem Speech Genres” 60). Both the autobiography and the novel are common genres in which this syndrome is represented in literature, which is why a book of each genre has been chosen to be analysed in this research paper. An autobiography is defined as a genre that has as primary objective “tell(ing) the story of one’s life” (Gilmore 3). Its particles are not fixed, because of the fact that it is written by each individual in his or her own personal way allowing great creativity. However, some common characteristics can be spotted among autobiographies. Most of them are written in the first person singular, which is related to the fact that the writer, “the narrator and the protagonist” share almost the same identity (Lejeune qtd. in Anderson 2) and follow mainly a narrative structure (Gilmore 31) using a relaxed style of writing (Gilmore 3). In order to tell a life story, the writer creates a fictional self of himself in the past, the protagonist; and a fictional self of himself in the present, the narrator. Each of them determines a specific temporal framework and two different personas. The importance of the experiences included in the text is established by the text producer by means of “discrimination and selection in face of the endless complexity of life” (Pascal 10). This selection is carried out taking into account the circumstances that contributed to “a revelation of something within personality” (Pascal 10). An autobiographical text presents readers with an interpretation of the past that includes the portrayal of an individual’s personality. It is the product of a process of introspection.

As regards the novel, it is a genre that has been in the loop for more than a century and it has been defined by multiple intellectuals in different ways. The definition that will structure this final project is the one provided by Bakhtin. He explains that the novel is a permanently unfinished genre, because it develops side by side with humanity’s history. It is directly related to its context (Bakhtin, “Epic and Hero” 7). The novel takes human beings as

objects of representation and intends, as Kundera (“The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes”)³ also said, to keep up with their developments and changes. No conventions can be used to define the novel because it adapts, as human beings do, to the environment adopting different characteristics for every historical period (Kundera, “The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes”).

Both genres possess unlimited tools to represent whatever the text producer wants. Nevertheless, one of them provides a fictional representation constructed by a person, in this case Mark Haddon, who does not suffer from Asperger’s syndrome, while the other displays a self-representation (Folkenflik 19) written by an individual suffering from the syndrome. Both representations are a product of the relationship between what Bakhtin (qtd. in Coelho Marchezan 219) called the author-person and the author-creator. The former is the real person that belongs to the world of life, while the latter is the same person but in the world of art (Smith 27). The author-person is the one that provides the author-creator with an ideology and ethics that later will structure the hero and the other characters in the literary work (Arán 17). The fictional representation of the syndrome may lead to a complex social situation in which stereotypes are developed (Draaisma 1476) since it is produced by an author-person who does not suffer from the syndrome. Even though fiction writers do not hide the fact that they provide a representation of the syndrome as outsiders, there is a tendency to take what is said in novels into account to observe reality. This leads to misunderstanding some aspects of Asperger’s syndrome, and how it is actually experienced by those who are ill.

Hypothesis

In the novel *The Curious Case of the Dog in the Night-Time*, an exaggerated and stereotyped representation of Asperger’s syndrome and its symptoms is given, while in the

³ According to *MLA Handbook* (8th Edition), in order to quote an e-book without page numbers or fixed positions you must “include in the text or in a parenthesis enough information for the reader to find the corresponding entry” (388). That is why, the name of the essay is provided in the quotes from *The Art of the Novel*.

autobiography *The Girl with the Curly Hair* by Alis Rowe, Asperger's representation is the result of a process of acceptance and introspection, which provides the narrative with authenticity and accuracy.

Objectives

General

- To analyse differences in the representation of Asperger's syndrome by two different text producers and in two different genres: the novel and the autobiography.
- To analyse the representation of Asperger's syndrome and its symptoms in Mark Haddon's novel *The Curious Case of the Dog in the Night-Time* and Alis Rowe's autobiography *The Girl with the Curly Hair*.

Specific

- To study, compare and contrast the autobiography's and novel's characteristics as genres and their influence on the representation of Asperger's syndrome and its symptoms: inability to understand the use of metaphors, highly logical and visual thinking, and lack of comprehension of people's emotions and interests through extracts from Alis Rowe's autobiography *The Girl with the Curly Hair* and Mark Haddon's novel *The Curious Case of the Dog in the Night-Time*.
- To study, compare and contrast the text producer in the autobiography and the novel and its influence on the representation of Asperger's syndrome and its symptoms: inability to understand the use of metaphors, highly logical and visual thinking, and lack of comprehension of people's emotions and interests through extracts from Alis Rowe's autobiography *The Girl with the Curly Hair* and Mark Haddon's novel *The Curious Case of the Dog in the Night-Time*.
- To identify, study, compare and contrast extracts in which the following Asperger's symptoms are present or discussed by Mark Haddon's character, Christopher, and Alis

Rowe's fictional self: inability to understand the use of metaphoric expressions, highly logical and visual thinking, and lack of comprehension of people's emotions and interests.

- To study, compare and contrast Asperger's syndrome representation in Mark Haddon's character, Christopher, and Alis Rowe's fictional self through extracts that include the previously mentioned symptoms.

Methodology, Instruments and Data Analysis

This research study is framed within the field of studies of literature. It follows a qualitative paradigm of investigation, since it does not include any quantitative data or instrument. The instrument chosen for this research is content and critical analysis. A metatext has been produced with the analysis of quotations from each literary work. This metatext provides evidence that proves the hypothesis presented above and an interpretation of the data collected from each literary work. The analysis has been structured following the objectives of this research study.

Content Analysis

1. Genres

1.1 The Autobiography in Rowe's Text

Alis Rowe's *The Girl with the Curly Hair* exhibits the characteristics of an autobiography. First of all, it narrates somebody's life story (Gilmore 3) in the first person singular. It tells the story of Alis Rowe, a twenty-three-year-old British woman living close to London: "I am Alis, aka The Girl with the Curly Hair. ... I am now in my twenties" (Rowe "Preface")⁴. It also

⁴ According to *MLA Handbook* (8th Edition), in order to quote an e-book without page numbers or fixed positions you must "include in the text or in a parenthesis enough information for the reader to find the corresponding entry" (388). That is why, numbers and names of the chapters or sections are provided in the quotes from *The Girl with the Curly Hair*.

presents two self-representations of the text producer (Lejeune qtd. in Anderson 2): Alis Rowe in the present and Alis Rowe in the past. Each of these personas has different feelings and ways of understanding the world. Alis in the past is the protagonist, who has not been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome yet, while Alis in the present is the narrator, who is already familiar with her condition: "This book is about my experiences growing up with Asperger's syndrome, undiagnosed but always knowing I was different" (Rowe, "Preface").

As Pascal sustains, an individual's life is complex and cannot be compressed entirely in a book, which is why only a selection of specific life events is fictionalized in an autobiography (10). The choice of those experiences has been made in this text focusing on Alis Rowe's Asperger's syndrome. Throughout the book, the reader is presented with a recount of different situations in the protagonist's life that shaped her personality. Every description of events is accompanied by the feelings and thoughts that the protagonist experienced, which depicts, as established by Pascal too, the result of a process of "revelation" (10) in which the narrator portrays how her personality and life were and are determined by Asperger's syndrome: "I always knew something in my brain wasn't 'wired' the same as most people's ... Since my diagnosis, I feel able to recognize how Asperger's syndrome interacts with my life" (Rowe "Foreword"). Personal growth and psychological maturity are made explicit by including emotional information. This is essential in an autobiographic text.

Because of the freedom allowed by this genre, the style, the format and the organization of the book are relaxed (Gilmore 3). These characteristics have been a decision of the text producer without following any specific convention. The narrator explains she "wasn't sure about how to begin –or even structure– this book. The thing about ... Asperger's syndrome is that it can't really be broken down into different sections" (Rowe, ch. 2, sec. "An Overwhelming Desire to Be Away from my Peers"). The book is mainly chronologically structured, which is

usually the case in autobiographies. However, there are events included that cannot be placed in time. The events that the narrator wants to emphasize are placed in a blue framed box. Also, there are grey colored parts by the end of each recount with a piece of advice for *neurotypicals*, which contains a general statement about how an *aspie*⁵ would perceive the situation described, and how to help them.

1.2 The Novel in Mark Haddon's Text

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon follows the general definition of the novel provided by Bakhtin in his essay "Epic and Novel". First of all, it is written in prose and it portrays an unfinished "hero" that presents flaws as well as positive traits (10). This hero changes throughout the novel (10). Christopher is a teenage boy who suffers from Asperger's syndrome. Even though he is highly intelligent, he cannot establish deep empathic relationships with those around him. By the end of the novel, after having gone through many experiences, Christopher changes some of his views about the world. He manages to mature and learn from what he faces in life.

The text is related to the socio-historical context in which it was written, too (Bakhtin 7). It portrays an English society in which people who suffer from Asperger's syndrome face many difficulties and, in some cases, discrimination in order to achieve their objectives. Education, for example, is not available for them in the same way that it is for others. Christopher needs to struggle to be able to sit for his Mathematics A level exam since it is not supposed to be taken by people who "have special needs" (Haddon 56). The text reflects the society in which it is produced, as Kundera would assert ("The Depreciated Legacy of Cervantes"). That is to say, it represents how people are not totally aware of what Asperger's syndrome is. Christopher's neighbors do not understand his behavior. In fact, when he starts investigating Wellington's murder, the dog's murder, people cannot see the point in what he is doing. They do not even

⁵ People that suffer from Asperger's syndrome call themselves *aspies*. This term has been found in Rowe's autobiography.

consider the fact that a person kills a dog a murder.

1.3 Convergence of the Autobiography and the Novel

Both Rowe and Haddon's texts build their meaning through what Bakhtin (qtd. in Coelho Marchezan 219-220) called the author-person and the author-creator. The former is the real person that belongs to the world of life, while the latter is the same person, but in the world of art (Smith 27). These two concepts cannot be separated from each other, since the author person is the one that provides the author creator with an ideology and ethics that later will structure the hero and the other characters in the literary work (Arán 17). Then, "There is no radical rupture between author-person and author-creator, or a complete alienation between author-person and his work" (Coelho Marchezan 219). This means that in the autobiography and in the novel, the author-person's world of life is included in author-creator's world of art. It gets transmitted through Alis' self-representations and Haddon's characters, and it has an impact on the representation of Asperger's syndrome, too.

In Rowe's text, the author-person and author-creator are individuals who live with the syndrome and do not perceive it as a paralyzing condition, so Asperger's syndrome is represented as a mental condition that is not easy to live with, but that can be handled by those who suffer it. On the other hand, in Haddon's novel, the syndrome is represented as an insurmountable condition that prevents its sufferers from leading a healthy and happy life. This difference lies on the fact that in Haddon's novel neither the author-person nor the author-creator suffer from Asperger's syndrome. Consequently, its representation is an exaggerated description of events in which the characteristics of the condition are evident. While Haddon knows about these characteristics out of reading books about the syndrome, Rowe has first-hand experience in everything involved in Asperger's syndrome because she is an *aspie*. Haddon built a character for fiction, while Rowe built a self-representation for an autobiographic text out of experience.

Last but not least, the meaning of the literary product is completed by the reader who

will re-capitalise the text depending on his or her own reality, that is to say, the reader's own time and space. However, the author's guide will always be present in the text for the reader to be able to grasp his ideas and conceptions (Coelho Marchezan 219). The author is always in the tangent.

The reader of Rowe's autobiography gets a representation of Asperger's syndrome that is not taken to an extreme. Although it is a condition that affects people's life, it is not portrayed as a catastrophe. In fact, some characteristics are defined as positive, like concentration abilities. Then, the reader will most probably not give the syndrome a completely negative and stereotyped meaning to being on the spectrum. In contrast, Haddon's novel provides the reader with a dramatic view of the syndrome and no concessions are made. It is represented as a mental condition that cannot be controlled in any way by those who suffer it. It completely alienates them. This leads to the reader's development of an extremely severe conception of Asperger's sufferers, which matches in every way what psychology manuals, such as DSM, describe, setting aside individuality and possibilities of improvement.

2. Representation of Asperger's Syndrome

A constant interrelationship between how the mind of an *aspie*, that of a *neurotypical* and the world in general work is presented throughout both texts. Nevertheless, there are differences as to how the syndrome is represented. As it has been mentioned before, the focus of this thesis will be put on the representation of Asperger's syndrome sufferers' inability to understand the use of metaphors, highly logical and visual thinking, and lack of comprehension of people's emotions and interests. These characteristics are magnified in the novel, while in the autobiography they are not. This is due to the fact that a novel is written by an author-person that works out of knowledge that has been acquired by means of research with the objective of creating a fictional text. However, the autobiography is developed by an author-person that writes out of experience with the objective of sharing her life story and helping others.

2.1 Inability to understand the use of metaphors

The first characteristic to be described is Asperger's syndrome sufferers' inability to understand the use of metaphors (DSM IV 75). This trait is included in both literary works, but the degree of severity awarded to it differs. In the autobiography, it is not taken to an extreme. It is presented as an obstacle that can be easily overcome. In fact, the narrator uses metaphors to explain some experiences and to make them more intelligible for the reader. However, in the novel, this characteristic of the syndrome is carefully developed. The text producer punctiliously avoids the use of metaphors on the part of the narrator/main character. These figures of speech are replaced with similes, so that Christopher portrays an *aspie* that fits the stereotype in a psychology manual.

In *The Girl with the Curly Hair*, metaphors are presented as an element of non-literal/figurative language. This type of language is complex for individuals with Asperger's syndrome. However, it is not presented as something impossible to understand, but as a use of language which is more difficult for these people to comprehend. This is how the narrator explains her experience with non-literal language:

I've always been an avid reader and I did really well at English in school. I know about metaphors and am quick to recognize them in books. But although I understand non-literal phrases, it takes me a bit longer to process them than perhaps it does for other people. I've 'learned' to realize when people are speaking literally and when they are not, however because it takes me a longer time to process these types of phrases, I often feel flustered. (Rowe, ch. 6, sec. "Taking things literally")

In this quote, the narrator explains that she had to "learn" how to spot and understand figurative language. This means that even though it is hard for her, she can comprehend it. For *neurotypicals*, figurative language is part of their everyday life. They have not learned to interpret it since it has been acquired as a part of language. In fact, it can be hard for them to identify it.

Within this text's representation of the syndrome's sufferers, it is also portrayed how understanding non-literal language does not come easy for them. Even though the following example involves a metonymic expression, it is an illustration of how these individuals process language literally:

One of my earliest memories of being a bit confused about literal language was when I was about 18 and it was quite trendy to be 'going out for a coffee' with your friends. The first time I heard this, I was quite worried because I hate coffee. Several coffee shop meetings later, I realized that 'going out for coffee' didn't necessarily mean that; it could mean other drinks that I liked. (Rowe, ch. 6, sec. "Taking things literally")

This extract shows how, for individuals with the syndrome, "coffee" refers to a beverage obtained by pouring hot water into a mug with coffee grain powder. It cannot encompass all the other drinks that can be consumed in a coffee shop, like tea or a milkshake. It has taken the protagonist time to process that metonymic relationship. For the narrator, these metonymic expressions "are just inaccurate" (Rowe, ch. 6, sec. "Taking things literally") but they are not impossible to learn or understand as it is portrayed by the novel's main character.

Alis is represented as an individual who needs to store in her mind those expressions that are not literal. She has a 'book of common phrases by NTs⁶ and what they really mean'" (Rowe, ch. 6, sec. "Taking things literally"). In this quote, it is evident how non-literal language needs to be learned by people with Asperger's syndrome. In the case of Alis, she kept a record of situations in which she could find confusing expressions, what they mean, and how to react to them.

Even though the narrator presents herself as an individual having problems processing non-literal language because of her syndrome, there are passages in the text in which she uses metaphors to make specific concepts and feelings easier to grasp. This does not happen in

⁶ Neurotypicals

Haddon's novel.

An example of this is the “social energy tank” metaphor. It is used to illustrate how the narrator/main character cannot socialize with people every day because it leads to an emotional crisis. The narrator explains that *aspies* think too much about what they are going to do or say. This makes them feel exhausted. Then, social encounters consume a lot of their energy. In the following extract, this is explained: “For the majority of *neurotypicals*, it seems to me that they live a relatively smooth life ... Many people do not need to think much before they do something. For people with Asperger's Syndrome, **we always need to think before we do.** This thinking burns up our social energy” (Rowe, ch. 8, sec. “Social energy levels: A Life Spent Making Choices”; emphasis in original).

In the previous quote, the narrator describes how, for a person suffering from Asperger's syndrome, it is a great effort to get involved in social encounters. The fact that they have to think before doing any activity, even speaking, makes it tiring for them to socialize. That is why, the social energy tank metaphor is developed. It is a simpler way of presenting to the reader with the amount of effort that socializing implies for an *aspie* and how it differs from that made by *neurotypicals*. “I've always known that my social energy levels were lower than other people's. My social energy tank is probably never completely full and even if it is, it empties quickly (Rowe, ch. 8, sec. “Social energy levels: A Life Spent Making Choices”). For *neurotypicals*, social encounters do not consume so much energy. They are everyday situations for them, and they react in an automatic way. However, *aspies* need to think about how they are supposed to behave during a specific interaction, which reduces their social energy very quickly.

The narrator also explains how she behaves in public using a metaphor. The “Normal mask metaphor” refers to the personality traits the narrator pretended to have in public and not to a real mask. It has been developed mainly in the chapter “The Normal Mask” (Rowe). However, it appears in other chapters too, for example, in “Romantic Relationships and

Love”: “Without my normal mask, it seems to be extremely hard to maintain a straightforward relationship” (Rowe, ch. 8, sec. “Romantic Relationships and Love”).

As it can be read in the previous examples, Alis is represented as a person who develops metaphors despite being within the spectrum; however, Christopher is represented in the novel as an *aspie* who is totally unable to produce this figure of speech. The representation of the syndrome’s sufferers’ relationship to metaphors is different in each text. That is to say, it varies depending on the genre.

It should be emphasized that fossilized metaphors, like idioms, can be identified in different parts of Rowe’s text. “I don’t like letting my friends down” (Rowe, ch. 8 sec. “Social Energy Levels: Planning social meetings”) or “This means that I’m now at a low ebb” (Rowe, ch. 8, sec. “Social energy levels: A Life Spent Making Choices”) are two examples of this fact. The metaphoric use of words and their variants can be found, too. For example, “pressure” and its variants are used to refer to social pressure like in the following quote: “School, university and jobs have all made me feel socially pressurised” (Rowe, ch. 8, sec. “Social pressure”).

All this data proves that even if individuals suffering from Asperger’s syndrome do not understand the use of metaphors, consciously or not, they do not exclude them from their use of language. This characteristic from the pathology is not presented as an insurmountable fault and it can be overcome.

In Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, as mentioned before, the panorama changes. Metaphors have mostly been excluded from the novel. Language has been mastered to be mostly literal. As in *The Girl with the Curly Hair*, the narrator, Christopher, explains that he has problems processing and using metaphors. This is illustrated in the following quote: “I find people confusing (...) people often talk using metaphors (...) it is when you describe something by using a word for something that it isn’t” (Haddon 19). The narrator also considers metaphors “should be called a lie because a pig is not like a day and

people do not have skeletons in their cupboards” (20). The representation of the *aspie* is one of a structured intolerant individual who will never even consider using a metaphor.

The explanation of what happens in Christopher’s head when he tries to process a metaphor shows how inflexible and book-based is Asperger’s syndrome representation in the novel, too: “When I try and make a picture of the phrase in my head it just confuses me because imagining an apple in someone’s eye doesn’t have anything to do with liking someone a lot and it makes you forget what the person was talking about” (Haddon 20). This quote portrays that a person suffering from Asperger’s syndrome cannot make sense of a mental picture that is not possible in reality, and that they find the fact that there is a referent other than the literal one confusing.

Another example of this lack of flexibility as regards metaphors can be found in the following extract:

I don’t know what Father means when he says “Stay out of other people’s business” because I do not know what he means by “other people’s business” because I do lots of things with other people, at school and in the shop and on the bus, and his job is going into other people’s houses and fixing their boilers and their heating. And all of these things are other people’s business. (Haddon 38)

In this fragment, Christopher explains how for him the expression “people’s business” may mean many different things. This is a metaphor, and he understands the concept of the words. However, he cannot restrict the meaning to what his father specifically wants to say, which is that he should not keep on asking questions about the dog’s death. What is obvious for Christopher’s father, a *neurotypical*, in the context of the conversation, is not so for Christopher.

Even though Christopher finds metaphors complex and unnecessary, he does feel comfortable with similes like “It looked as if there were two very small mice hiding in his nostrils” (Haddon 22). He provides an explanation in a footnote about this example:

This is not a *metaphor*; it is a *simile*, which means that it really did look like there were two very small mice hiding in his nostrils and if you make a picture in your head of a man with two very small mice hiding in his nostrils you will know what the police inspector looked like. And a simile is not a lie, unless it is a bad simile (Haddon 22; emphasis in original)

As it has been described in the quote, Christopher considers similes to be true because he can visualize them in his head. He can make a picture of them. On the other hand, metaphors are lies for him, because they refer to something different from what the word is supposed to refer to. He cannot picture them in his head because metaphorical expressions do not match any literal referent.

Another instance in which a simile is used to purposely avoid a metaphor is in the following passage:

My memory is like a film. ... And when people ask me to remember something I can simply press **Rewind** and **Fast Forward** and **Pause** like on a video recorder, but more like a DVD player because I don't have to Rewind through everything in between to get to a memory of something a long time ago. And there are no buttons, either, because it is happening in my head (Haddon 96; emphasis in original)

Christopher compares his memory with a film. He can remember everything, so he can go back and forth in his mind remembering anything he wants. These memories are as precise and crystal clear as a scene in a movie. A *neurotypical* would have probably mentioned the fact that they can rewind, fast forward and pause events in their memories. It is simpler for them, and they would assume that everybody would understand what they mean. For an *aspie*, it is not the same. They are portrayed as clearly needing to explain the image they have built in their heads, and be strictly reasonable about what they say. In contrast with Alis' representation, Christopher is presented as being unable to leave anything unsaid or free to be interpreted. That is why,

the narrator explicitly says how he pictures his mind as a film.

Another simile is used by Christopher to portray what happened in his mind when he got into a fight with his father: “I had no memories for a short while. I know it was a short while because I checked my watch afterward. It was like someone had switched me off and then switched me on again” (Haddon 104). He feels the need to explain that it was as if someone had pressed a button and turned his mind off. He cannot only use the expression “switched me off” and let the reader understand its meaning in context.

Within his memory, this narrator describes a record of every experience he has gone through, especially social ones. This is pretty similar to what *The Girl with the Curly Hair*'s narrator mentions. This record helps both Rowe and Haddon's characters to know how to react to specific situations like Christopher describes in the following quote: “If people say things which don't make sense, like, ‘See you later, alligator,’ or ‘You'll catch your death in that,’ I do a **Search** and see if I have ever heard someone say this before” (Haddon 97; emphasis in original). In this extract, the narrator portrays how people with Asperger's syndrome try to use their experience to know how to recognize a situation and how to deal with it. Whenever they do not understand something such as “See you later, alligator” or “You'll catch your death in that,” they try to find in their mental record the expected answer they should give or the appropriate behavior they should have according to society's conventions.

Taking into account what has been presented, it can be said that in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, a more extreme portrayal is given of *aspies*' inability to understand and use metaphors. It can be associated to the fact that the narrator and main character have been created to fit the syndrome. The text producer has created Christopher to meet the description of the syndrome given in the different psychology manuals, and has manipulated language well enough to avoid every metaphoric instance.

2.2 Highly logical and visual thinking

Individuals who suffer from Asperger's syndrome present an understanding of the world that is different from that of a person who is not on the spectrum. According to the DSM IV, the organization of *aspies'* experiences is set by their own logic. They do not accept any conventional pattern that they consider unreasonable, and they need answers for questions that are obvious or irrelevant to a *neurotypical*. Apart from that, people within the spectrum are visual thinkers (75). They use drawings, graphics, tables and mind maps to structure their thoughts; they can also record images easily and remember them in detail. These workings of the mind are portrayed in both literary texts in different ways. Once again, the novel provides the reader with an exaggerated portrayal of one of Asperger's characteristics.

In *The Girl with the Curly Hair*, logical thinking is represented as a need that can be handled with other people's help. The narrator explains that she has to make sense of everything around her. She is all the time "examining my [her] surroundings, looking for reasons, or meanings in everything" (Rowe, ch. 6 sec. "An Observer in Life"). Every inch of the world needs to have an explanation for being as it is. For that matter, she asks questions all the time as it is mentioned in the following quote: "My mother is a kind and patient woman. Because human beings are so illogical, she has to answer all questions that I have, which the world just cannot answer. Every day, she is bombarded with my questions about **why** and **how** something could have happened" (Rowe, ch. 5, sec. "Worries about Abandonment"; emphasis in original).

Asking questions is represented as the way *aspies* have to make sense of their world in both texts. They ask "questions that might seem meaningless" (Rowe, ch. 5, sec. "An Endless List of Questions") about things that would go unnoticed to be able to structure their minds. They need to know everything to be at ease with themselves. Nevertheless, while in the autobiography, this need can be controlled and concessions can be made by Alis, in the novel, Christopher, who represents *aspies'* voices, cannot accept anything that does not make sense

to him.

Aspies perceive that they are different from *neurotypicals* as regards what is considered important and the amount of knowledge they need to have to feel comfortable with their surroundings. This is represented in the autobiography when the narrator expresses the following: “I am under the impression that other people can just shrug these sort [*sic*] of questions off, or perhaps they don’t ask them at all. But I am always questioning and I cannot stop thinking about something unless it has been answered for me” (Rowe, ch. 5, sec. “An Endless List of Questions”). It is clear in these lines that for *aspies* every detail of the world needs to be explained. However, in every experience related to this need that is narrated in *The Girl with the Curly Hair*, Alis is represented as capable of controlling herself by asking for help.

One of the experiences that is narrated in the text is titled “Orange Hands” and it describes how Alis could not understand why it was acceptable for people to ask her about the orange coloured hands, but it was not appropriate to ask about other aspects of people’s appearance. This situation is presented as follows:

Due to the amount of carrots I eat, my hands sometimes have a slight orange tinge. To a distant eye, it just looks like I am very tanned!

Sometimes people will say something to me, such as ‘Your hands are very orange. What is that?’

... I do not understand why it is considered acceptable for people to ask about my skin colour, yet apparently it is considered unacceptable for me to, for example, ask why somebody is overweight.

For this one, my mum explained that the reason it is more acceptable for people to comment on orange hands, is [*sic*] because it’s more unusual. It’s still annoying, but I sort of understand this. (Rowe, 2013, “An Endless List of Questions”; emphasis in original)

In the extract above, the reader can perceive how difficult it is for Alis, meaning for *aspies*, to understand conventions that have no reasonable account. It makes no sense in her head that she cannot ask other people about being overweight, while they are allowed to ask her about the colour of her hands. In this example, a concession is made by the Asperger's sufferer, though. She at least tries to understand and deal with the situation. This type of concessions are not made by the narrator/main character in the novel.

For a person within the spectrum, lacking knowledge is represented in Rowe's text as highly distressing. They get anxious when they cannot explain something logically or when their plans are disrupted. Their "existence runs on a very complicated thought process" (Rowe, ch. 6, sec. "Desire for knowledge/Needing to know things/'Scripting"). They analyse the logic in everything, so they get easily exhausted and confused when they do not have the time to go through every single detail of a situation in advance. "It bothers me when people don't explain why they are doing things. I need a full explanation for everything. I can become very confused by the actions of someone and so I am always asking 'why?'. Facts, reasons and rationale in conversation are incredibly important, otherwise I can feel very confused and distressed" (Rowe, ch. 6, sec. "Desire for knowledge/Needing to know things/'Scripting"), explains the narrator/main character.

These feelings of distress and confusion, and the search for knowledge are represented in the text as a key characteristic of *aspies*. However irrational this may seem sometimes, this is how these individuals make sense of the world. Only when they "receive explanations and reasons" (Rowe, ch. 6, sec. "Desire for knowledge/Needing to know things/'Scripting") are they able to understand and move forward.

Nevertheless, in the autobiography, the representation of this trait shared by those who suffer from Asperger's syndrome is not impossible to control. They can release their anxiety by getting answers. They are portrayed as capable of managing the situation and their feelings.

This logical thinking pattern is portrayed as the reason *aspies* have for planning everything meticulously. The narrator calls this “Scripting” (Lisky qtd. in Rowe, ch. 6, sec. “Desire for knowledge/Needing to know things/’Scripting”). Every single moment of the day is planned so as not to experience surprises. They analyse logically every step of their day so that it flows smoothly in their minds.

Apies’ mind is represented as a compilation of rules and reasons as it is mentioned in the following extract: “I need to know reasons and rules for everything ... If something is done in a certain way, I need to know why so that it will make sense. If it is too vague, ... I will struggle to understand or comply with the ‘rules.’ ... I do not understand it when a reason given is ‘Because I say so!’” (Rowe, ch. 6, sec. “A strong sense of individuality”). They need facts to back up any explanation. They cannot accept social conventions that seem illogical to them. However, as the narrator explains in the “Orange Hands” story, Alis is capable of making concessions and managing unstructured situations, while Christopher, the narrator/main character of the novel, cannot.

In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, logical thinking and how it is taken to an extreme can be identified. Christopher, like Alis, is portrayed as a sufferer from the syndrome that asks a lot of questions because he needs to know facts and reasons of any situation happening in his surroundings to comprehend it. This can be appreciated when Christopher learns about his mother’s alleged death:

Father said that she had a heart attack and it wasn’t expected.

I said, ‘What kind of heart attack?’ because I was surprised.

... Father said he didn’t know what kind of heart attack she had and now wasn’t the moment to be asking questions like that.

I said that it was probably an aneurysm.

... an aneurysm is when a blood vessel breaks and blood doesn’t get to the muscles

because it is leaking.

On the other hand, it could have been an embolism, because your blood vessels clots much more easily when you are lying down for a long time, like when you are in a hospital. (Haddon 37)

In a moment in which any other child would have been suffering because of their mother's death, Christopher, *aspies'* voice in this literary text, is represented as a highly reasonable individual who asked questions about the type of heart attack she had had. This is supposed to show that he needs a rational explanation to comprehend any life experience, even those that are emotionally striking. Until he does not get those explanations, he is not at ease.

Christopher, the same as Alis, is represented as having difficulties finding the point of some social conventions, which is common for people suffering from Asperger's syndrome. He relates these conventions to telling the truth, too. For *aspies*, it makes no sense to lie about anything. He explains that "people say that you always have to tell the truth. But they don't mean this because you are not allowed to tell old people that they are old and you are not allowed to tell people if they smell funny or if a grown-up has made a fart. And you are not allowed to say, 'I don't like you,' unless that person has been horrible to you" (Haddon 60). As Alis, Christopher is portrayed as someone unable to understand why people established not lying as a rule if they are not going to follow it. He does not understand why telling others the truth about their appearance or smell is wrong. The truth must never be wrong according to his way of seeing things.

Even though irrational behaviour is portrayed in both literary texts as something that disrupts them, Christopher takes it to an extreme. Lying, for example, is something he is not willing to tolerate or to carry out as he mentions in this extract:

I do not tell lies ... because I can't tell lies.

A lie is when you say something happened which didn't happen. But there is only

ever one thing which happened at a particular time and a particular place...

This is another reason why I don't like proper novels, because they are lies about things which didn't happen and they make me feel shaky and scared.

And this is why everything I have written here is true. (Haddon 24)

As it can be read, there is no reasonable grounding for telling that something happened when it did not. That is why, Christopher neither lies nor tolerates novels. This is an extreme portrayal of an *aspie*. Alis enjoys novels, because she can differentiate reality from fiction, while Christopher is represented as a structured inflexible young man to whom fiction is out of grasp.

Both Alis and Christopher are portrayed as people who follow strict routines and apply “scripting” to make their days reasonable. That is to say, they are represented as permanent planners who have to know exactly everything they will confront every day at every time to be psychologically at ease. However, that does not mean that their routine makes sense to *neurotypicals*. This can be identified when Christopher is explaining to the school's psychologist what needs to happen to have a “Super Good Day,” a “Good Day,” a “Quite Good Day,” and a “Black Day”:

Mr. Jeavons, the psychologist at school, once asked me why 4 red cars in a row made it a **Good Day**, and 3 red cars in a row made it **Quite Good Day**, and 5 red cars in a row made it a **Super Good Day**, and why 4 yellow cars in a row made it a **Black Day**, which is a day I don't speak to anyone and sit on my own reading books and don't eat my lunch and *Take No Risks*.

I said that I liked things to be in a nice order. And one way of things being in a nice order was to be logical. Especially if those things were numbers or an argument. [*sic*] (Haddon 31; emphasis in original)

For Christopher, being logical involves following a specific pattern consistently. However, this order of doing things does not necessarily have to make sense to others. For

example, he mentions what his father does when he gets up: “When Father got up in the morning he always put his trousers on before he put his socks on and it wasn’t logical but he always did it that way, because he likes things in a nice order, too” (Haddon 31). The representation of logical thinking of *aspies* encompasses their own logic, not others. Whenever his routine changes, the narrator/main character shuts down: “I saw 4 yellow cars in a row on the way to school...which made it a **Black Day**...so I didn’t speak to anyone and for the whole afternoon I sat in the corner of the Library groaning with my head pressed into the join between two walls” (Haddon 68: emphasis in original). While in the autobiography this situation alters Alis, too, it does not paralyze her.

After finding out that his father has murdered the dog and that his mother has been alive all the time, another instance of “scripting” can be identified. The narrator retells the moment in which he decided to escape from his father’s house to go to London and find his mother: “And then I *Formulated a Plan*. And that made me feel better because there was something in my head that had an order and a pattern and I just had to follow the instructions one after the other” (Haddon 164; emphasis in original). Finding out that his father is the killer and that he has lied about his mother’s death build an unexpected situation for the narrator. Christopher feels he cannot trust his father anymore, which distresses him. He cannot understand his father’s explanation. That is why, he needs a plan to feel at ease again. He creates order and logic to cope with a situation that was new and frightening in his mind. Logic gives him peace.

In *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, every aspect that has been mentioned is taken to an extreme. All throughout the text, Christopher acts as if he could not make any concessions within his rationale. Unlike Alis Rowe’s fictional representation, Christopher cannot accept what is not logical to his eyes. The narrator of *The Girl with the Curly Hair* portrays this need of logic, order and reason as highly important. However, she explains how she does not get paralysed by them. They affect her deeply, but she can deal with

them.

In the case of Christopher, he is portrayed in the novel as someone who cannot stand any disruption of his logic and order. This is clearly shown by the fact that Christopher escapes his father's house because he lied. Lying is not part of the rationale that he applies to love (Haddon 109), so he could not deal with it and left.

After going through both texts, it can be inferred that in the autobiography, Asperger's syndrome is pictured as a pathology that can be handled, and that it even has some positive aspects. In contrast, the reader gets a shocking picture when he or she reads Haddon's novel. It is even difficult to believe how those on the spectrum can lead a healthy peaceful life out of the text.

Apart from having a highly logical mind structure, *aspies* are represented in both narratives as people who resort to visual thinking more than *neurotypicals*. They use mind maps, tables, graphics and drawings to make the world more intelligible for them. Also, they have photographic memory, which means that they keep a record of images in detail.

Even though the narrator of *The Girl with the Curly Hair* does not discuss visual thinking in detail, there are some examples that portray this visual interpretation of the world that people on the syndrome share. One of them is present when the narrator discusses films. She explains her reluctance "to watch films above an age 12 rating" (Rowe, ch. 6, sec. "Easily offended"), since they distress her. She retells what happened to her when she watched part of a film with an age eighteen rating: "Several years ago I made the biggest mistake watching a thriller film with an 18 rating (I was young and bored one summer holiday) and all these years later I am still disturbed by some of the scenes which I can still picture extremely vividly in my mind" (Rowe, ch. 6, sec. "Easily offended"). This illustrates how an image can affect an *aspie*, and how their photographic memory works. They pay attention to every detail in the picture, and that stays in their heads. If the picture is unpleasant, they get easily disrupted.

In the same way, those who suffer Asperger's syndrome are represented as needing facts to comprehend the world; they are portrayed as using visual input to determine if specific events have actually happened. They cannot relate to experiences they have not gone through, so they require visual evidence of situations that take place in the world to believe them. That is why, the narrator of *The Girl with the Curly Hair* explains the following: "I don't want to believe there are bad people, murder, crime and rape; and if I don't see them, then I don't have to believe they happen" (Rowe, ch 6, sec. "Easily offended"). She ignores the news, for example, since if she does not have the image of negative things happening around the world, she does not have to acknowledge their existence. The narrator explicitly mentions that "unpleasant scenes and words –fantasy or otherwise– remain a vivid picture in my [her] mind and can be recalled at any time in the future" (Rowe, ch. 6, sec. "Easily offended"). Because of her photographic memory, she remembers everything in detail. Her memories as well as her sense of reality are structured by pictures.

Another example of how they assimilate their environments visually is illustrated in the autobiography when the narrator expresses how she "observes" everything around her. She presents herself as "An observer in life:" "I often consider myself an observer in life, rather than a participant...I love observing all kinds of human behaviour and emotion. I think that it is because of my interest in observing that I have a fair amount of knowledge about the behaviour of others" (Rowe, ch 6, sec. "An observer in life"). The same as Christopher in Haddon's novel, she needs to watch people and associate what she sees with what that is supposed to mean. That way she makes sense of human beings. The fact that she also pays attention to details and identifies patterns to make sense of the world is related to *aspies* portrayal as "observers": "I am very aware of the little things, such as patterns and subtleties in the world around me. Everything around me is like a different piece in a jigsaw puzzle" (Rowe, ch. 6, sec. "An observer in life"). In this quote, it is represented that she thinks visually, since she compares

the world with a puzzle that she needs to understand the whole perspective of the situation. Her world is represented as a compilation of patterns, images and logic relationships.

The impact of these descriptions on the reader are important since they provide him or her with an insight into the visually organised mind of an *aspie*. Nevertheless, in the autobiography, visual thinking is portrayed as a characteristic of a person that is important, but that does not prevent him or her from leading a standard life. In fact, as the reading takes place, the reader may associate this Asperger's trait with multiple intelligences and how some people tend to develop more some parts of the brain than others.

It should be pointed that the text includes visual input, too. All throughout the autobiography, the narrator uses mind maps, charts and illustrations to make her message clearer. Although it is not explicitly mentioned, it can be inferred that visual stimulus is represented as fundamental for *aspies* to process information. An example of those visual aids included by the narrator is a drawing illustrating the social energy tank metaphor that has been explained in the previous section (Fig. 1). This picture is explained in the following way: “In this example my physical energy tank is full (10 bars of the total 10 available) and my social energy is less than half full (3.5 bars of the total available). My total energy is therefore nearly three quarters full (6.5 bars)” (Rowe, ch. 8, sec. “Social energy levels”). She resorts to visual aids to explain herself, even though the idea can be easily understood. She does this because it is easier for her to visually grasp information, especially figurative language.

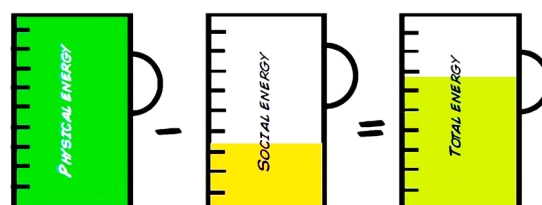


Fig. 1. Rowe, Alis. “Social energy levels.” *The Girl with the Curly Hair*. Lonely Mind Books, 2013.

As it has been mentioned previously, the narrator did not know how to organize the book, because her syndrome cannot be broken down to create chapters. To illustrate this, she turns to visual content in order to explain her “wrong planet” (Fig. 2). In the illustration, a disorganised and fragmented planet is presented. Its parts are joined in an irregular manner imitating a spider’s web, and each part represents pathologies and particularities that Asperger’s syndrome encompasses. This is how she describes this visual support: “This is my “wrong planet.” It’s a tangled web of all the things that make up my Asperger’s syndrome, including anxiety, depression, OCD, ADHD, hypersensitivity, emotional sensitivity, giftedness, individuality, etc.” (Rowe, ch. 2, sec. “An Overwhelming Desire to Be Away From My Peers...”). This drawing is expected to portray that the syndrome is part of the narrator’s life and identity. It is not a uniform structured line, but it is a messy, overlapping web.

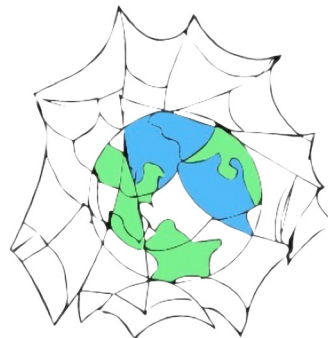


Fig. 2. Rowe, Alis. ““An overwhelming desire to be away from my peers... .”” *The Girl with the Curly Hair*. Lonely Mind Books, 2013.

Finally, it is relevant to introduce an example of how *neurotypicals*’ voices are represented in the text. Dialogue bubbles are used to portray what people outside the spectrum usually say or believe. For example, when the narrator discusses how people tend to enjoy having a varied diet while she does not, she inserts dialogue bubbles using frequent expressions *neurotypicals* use to talk about food and variety (Fig. 3). Each bubble illustrates everyday situations in which a person seeks to eat something that is not within their routinary meals.



Fig. 3. Rowe, Alis. "Coordination and Clumsiness." *The Girl with the Curly Hair*. Lonely Mind Books, 2013.

All these images contribute to help the reader comprehend how *aspies* organize and analyse information. They portray these people's way of making sense of the world, and they make it more intelligible for *neurotypicals*.

This is not the case in Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* since many of the visual aids that are provided reinforce the idea of *aspies* as non-standard meticulous observers who cannot deal with what they cannot analyse visually and logically.

Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* also includes visual aids and instances in which photographic memory is discussed to portray Asperger's sufferers' visual thinking. In fact, there is a lot more visual stimuli in this text than in Rowe's autobiography. Nevertheless, many of the visual aids and descriptions provided in the novel reinforce the idea of *aspies* as non-standard meticulous observers who cannot deal with what they cannot analyse visually and logically, and in some cases intelligibility is not achieved through the illustrations presented in the text. They are used to contribute to the development of a stereotyped character. *Aspies'* highly visual mind is portrayed as a characteristic that needs to be made explicit so that the reader is able to fully comprehend the pathology.

In the case of Christopher, his visual thinking is represented by descriptions he provides of every people in every situation. This ability to describe every person and situation in detail is used to depict *aspies'* photographic memory. They are portrayed as individuals who remember every detail of their experiences. As it has been already mentioned when discussing metaphors,

aspies are described as people who record every situation they have gone through in their mind. They store information that is unimportant to the eyes of *neurotypicals* to make sense of the world around them. For example, when the narrator/main character of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* retells how his father found the book he has been writing, he describes his father appearance and actions in depth:

Father came home at 5:48 p.m. I heard him come through the front door. Then he came into the living room. He was wearing a lime green and sky blue check shirt and there was a double knot on one of his shoes but not on the other. He was carrying an old advert for Fussell's Milk Powder which was made of metal and painted with blue and white enamel and covered with little circles of rust which were like bullet-holes, but he didn't explain why he was carrying this. (Haddon 101)

In the previous example, people within the spectrum are portrayed as individuals who need to know exactly how Christopher's father looks like or the exact time when he arrives. Every piece of information is represented as relevant for Christopher, and it is appropriately stored in his mind due to his illness. Christopher explains that he sees "what they [people] are wearing, or if they have a walking stick, or funny hair, or certain type of glasses" (Haddon 97) and searches in his mind to see if he already knows them or not. Besides, *aspies* are portrayed as using their photographic memory to be able to identify specific situations. Christopher explains how he identifies an epileptic attack, for example, by searching in his memory film:

And if someone is lying on the floor at school, I do a Search through my memory to find a picture of someone having an epileptic fit and then I compare the picture with what is happening in front of me so I can decide whether they are just lying down and playing a game, or having a sleep, or whether they are having an epileptic fit. (Haddon 97)

Thanks to his photographic memory, the narrator is portrayed as capable of differentiating between a person suffering from an epileptic attack and a person playing on the floor. Out of

this recognition process, the narrator decides how to react.

Aspies' visual interpretation of the world is depicted as an ability that structures their mind. Nevertheless, the images in their head are described as memories of what they have seen in reality. They are portrayed as having problems as regards imagination. Christopher describes this trait as follows: "Other people have pictures in their heads, too. But they are different because the pictures in my head are all pictures of things which really happened. But other people have pictures in their heads of things which aren't real and didn't happen" (Haddon 98). The narrator/main character is explicitly expressing his inability to imagine things he has not experienced. He finds "it hard to imagine things which did not happen to" (Haddon 5) him. Even though both Alis and Christopher suffer from Asperger's syndrome, Christopher's portrayal of this particularity is exaggerated. While Alis mentions that she is able to consider different possible scenarios when her mother explains to her some confusing events, Christopher is not. For the novel's narrator, before knowing the truth about his mother, it was impossible to consider what he would say to his mother if she were alive, because she was dead (Haddon 99). He is represented as a person to whom it does not make sense to have a picture in his head of things or situations that are not real.

Apart from descriptions of people and situations in detail, and discussions about how Christopher's memory works, there are visual aids to illustrate how specific content is stored in his mind in a visual format, which shows the reader the particular way an *aspie* has of making sense of specific situations. That is to say, how a person within the spectrum thinks. One instance in which illustrations are used in the text takes place when Christopher retells his first meeting with Siobhan, his therapist. Pictures of faces illustrating different emotions are used by the therapist to help Christopher recognize them. Their visual thinking is represented as promoting their comprehension of others. Visual stimuli related to people's feelings and emotions are depicted as crucial for them since emotions are portrayed as complex for them to

grasp. Some of the drawings of those faces are included in the text (Fig. 4).

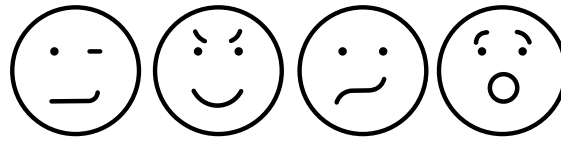


Fig. 4. Haddon, Mark. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Random House, 2003, p.2.

The description of his experience at the train station in London includes two separate pictures of how the texts from different signs look like in his head to represent how his mind works. One of them portrays how information is received in his head (Fig. 5) and another represents how the same information mixes up as a consequence of the syndrome (Fig. 6). Christopher receives the visual input, but he cannot process it. It is impossible for him to analyse every sign in detail as fast as it appears, so he gets confused and disrupted. *Aspies* are represented in the narrative as unable to be selective about what information to focus on. That is why, all the information gets mixed and impossible to understand in Christopher’s mind. The pictures illustrate how overwhelmed an individual within the spectrum gets by the visual and linguistic input.

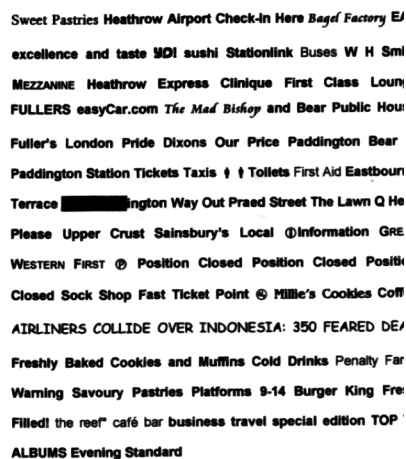


Fig. 5. Haddon, Mark. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Random House, 2003, p. 208.

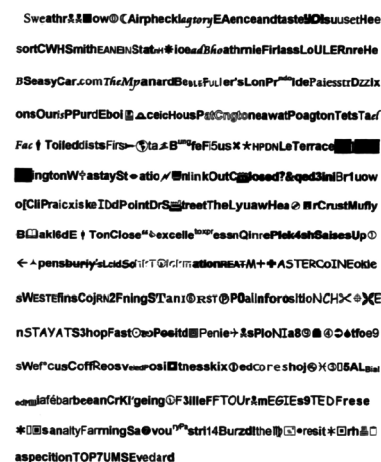


Fig. 6. Haddon, Mark. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Random House, 2003, p. 209.

Mind maps have also been included in Haddon's literary work. They are mainly used to represent how the narrator/main character structures the possibilities in his mind. Two examples of this can be found in Christopher's narration about finding out that his mother is still alive, and that his father is Wellington's murderer. Both maps are used as visual aids to explain how the narrator analyses different courses of action to avoid his father while he is hiding in the garden (Fig. 7 and Fig. 8). He crosses out those ideas that are not logical, and decides to carry out the one that in his mind seems achievable and more sensible. Everything is represented as happening in his mind in that way.

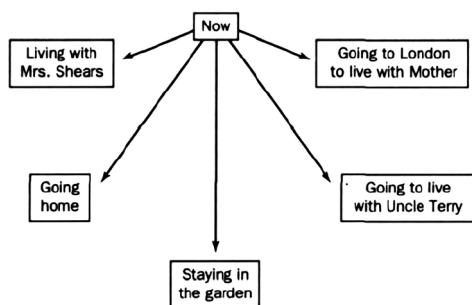


Fig. 7. Haddon, Mark. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Random House, 2003, p. 162.

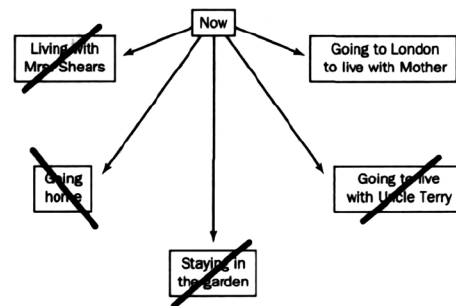


Fig. 8. Haddon, Mark. p. 163. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Random House, 2003, p. 163.

Finally, *aspies* are portrayed as individuals who are used to process reality in terms of specific details. Focusing on some particular characteristics instead of trying to process information as a whole helps them not only to understand their environment better, but also to keep calm. One instance in which this is represented in the novel happens when Christopher is travelling on the underground train to get to his mother's house. He feels confused and nervous because he "didn't like being in a room with 11 people in a tunnel" (Haddon 226), so he decides to concentrate on usually unnoticed aspects from the carriage. He tries to find patterns to create an organised image of some sort in his mind to calm himself down. He presents a visual aid of two patterns that he has memorised to focus his mind on something different from the

uncomfortable situation of travelling by underground. One of them represents the pattern of the walls (Fig. 9), and the other, the pattern of the seats (Fig. 10). He can provide a detailed picture of them because of his photographic memory.

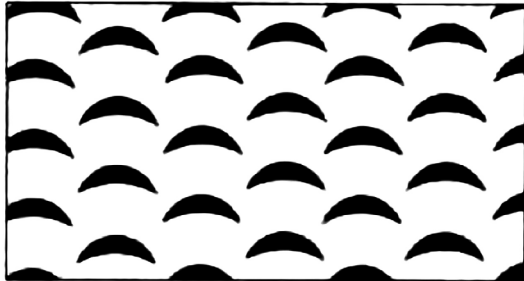


Fig. 9. Haddon, Mark. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Random House, 2003, p. 227.



Fig. 10. Haddon, Mark. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Random House, 2003, p. 227.

By analysing all these instances from both literary works, logical and visual thinking is portrayed as a fundamental characteristic of both fictional individuals suffering from Asperger's syndrome. Nevertheless, in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, these two ways of processing information are magnified. Its narrator/main character takes every instance of logical and visual thinking to an extreme. Numbers and details as regards images and patterns are incorporated to such extent that it is sometimes difficult for the reader to understand the input present in the novel. While this is supposed to represent the complexity of an *aspies*' mind in Haddon's literary work, it provides the reader with a stereotyped representation that seems to be taken from a psychology manual.

In contrast, in Rowe's *The Girl with the Curly Hair*, these thinking characteristics are shown for the reader to understand how an *aspies*' mind works, too, but they are not inaccessible or tiring for the reader. They are represented as a part of an *aspies*' life, but they are not portrayed as if an *aspies*' life were centred and ruled by these thinking skills.

2.3 Lack of Comprehension of People's Emotions and Interests

Neurotypicals' emotions and interests are portrayed in Rowe's autobiography and in Haddon's novel as two concepts that are difficult to grasp by people on the spectrum. This lack of comprehension is part of the syndrome according to the DSM IV (75), so it is a characteristic that has to be included to develop a fictional individual who suffers from Asperger's syndrome. Nonetheless, this trait has been exaggerated in the novel, too.

In *The Girl with the Curly Hair*, lacking the ability to understand other people's interests and emotions is portrayed as part of the syndrome, but it does not prevent the sufferer from leading a healthy social life. Even though Alis is represented as not knowing "much about mainstream things that other people seem to mainly find interesting and appealing" (Rowe, ch. 7, sec. "Jobs"), she tries to learn how to adapt herself to this. For example, she asks her parents about what is appropriate or not to talk about in a conversation, and they guide her. This is illustrated when she talks with her parents about their holidays. She wants to know details that for others are not relevant such as "which airport they flew from, what time they arrived, how comfortable the hotel bed was" (Rowe, ch. 8, sec. "Social Pressure"), among others. Her "neurotypical parents" have explained her that "although other people are also interested in these things, they probably find them less interesting and would rather not have a full conversation about them" (Rowe, ch. 8, sec. "Social Pressure").

Another interesting representation of how people on the spectrum have problems understanding *neurotypicals'* interests is what happened to Alis when she was a teenager. The narrator describes that everyone around her "was into wild alcohol abuse, cannabis, late night partying, and underage sex" (Rowe, ch. 4, sec. "What Were the Conformation Years?"), and she could not relate to that. She is represented as a girl that escapes from the standard. In fact, when her two friends from school "began to change into young women, ... they were no longer interested in video games and school work, preferring to talk about boys and fashion

instead. ...I [she] didn't share that interest" (Rowe, ch. 4, sec. "What Were the Conformation Years?"). However, Alis is represented as a person who successfully managed to overcome these problems. She did not understand her friends at first, but in the end, she was able to do it.

Christopher, on the other hand, is represented in Haddon's novel as a teenager who cannot understand other people at all. Even though this is not directly written in the novel, *aspies* are portrayed as people who only care about their own interests. The fact that there is no mentioning of others' interests provides the reader with a picture of the character. He only cares about himself, and this makes his representation, and consequently the one of *aspies*, self-centered and detached from the world.

Despite both Alis and Christopher suffering from Asperger's syndrome, Alis is represented as an individual that makes more concessions and effort to care about other people's interests, while Christopher does not. Both characters have obsessive behaviour towards what they like, weightlifting in Alis' case (Rowe, ch. 6, sec. "Obsessive interests"), and Maths and Physics in Christopher's (Haddon 33); but while Alis takes into account that others may not be interested in what she enjoys, and tries to avoid being self-centred, Christopher does not even mention what others think or care about. He is portrayed as an inflexible uncaring person to make him more similar to the psychology manual definition of Asperger's sufferers.

As regards emotions, they are difficult to process by those on the spectrum according to DSM IV (75). That is why Alis is portrayed as a person whose "emotional literacy is weak" (Rowe, ch. 8, sec. "Social Pressure"). The narrator describes herself as a person that finds it "hard to feel intermediate emotions. I [she] recognise[s] feelings of sadness or anxiety because they are so powerful and occur all the time...[she is] less able to recognise the 'in between' feelings such as uncertainty, agitation, irritability, and impatience" (Rowe, ch. 9, sec. "Asperger's syndrome: My Comorbid Condition"). This does not mean that *aspies* are depicted as unable to feel certain emotions, but that they have a hard time recognising intermediate

emotions whenever they experience them. Due to this emotional illiteracy, they are represented as not capable of recognising other people's emotions and feelings easily. For example, Alis mentions that she enjoys watching cartoons due to their explicitness. Unlike human beings, cartoons' expressions of feelings and emotions are standardized and exaggerated, which makes it easier for an *aspie* to process them because of their visual minds. She explains this as follows:

People on the autistic spectrum have problems with communication and one of the ways in which humans communicate is through our facial expressions...One of the reasons I like animated cartoons is that their expressions and body language are exaggerated...the non-verbal messages are obvious. I am able to follow a character's speaking and physical mannerisms or expressions at the same time. (Rowe, ch. 6, sec. "Reading Faces").

Nevertheless, in this work *aspies* are portrayed as individuals who can identify feelings after they learn how to. They are represented as people who can lead a life in which they can manage to understand others. In fact, they are described as feeling too much for others, since they tend to experience extreme emotions. For example, when the narrator explains her feelings for others she cares about, she states: "I do not like the people I care about to feel upset. Unfortunately though, what happens is that I get upset too. I can then quickly switch from trying to help them to ignoring them, because I'm overwhelmed" (Rowe, ch. 6, sec. "Sensitive But Lacking Empathy"). So, even though *aspies* are portrayed as capable of learning how to detect when others are upset, they cannot help other people.

Haddon's narrator is also represented as an individual who cannot understand others' emotions. As it has been previously mentioned, the narrator of the novel has problems identifying emotions that people around him are going through. When his psychologist shows him illustrations of different emotions, he cannot recognise all of them (Haddon 2). Another example in which *aspies'* lack of comprehension of others' emotions is represented in the literary work is how Christopher realises that someone is angry. He can only tell if someone is

experiencing that emotion if they shout or hit things. Otherwise, he is not aware of it: “I didn’t realise that he was angry because he wasn’t shouting” (Haddon 101). He learnt to associate specific behaviour with different emotions, which means that his interpretation of others is carried out following standardized behavioural patterns he developed for each emotion. This is related to emotional literacy, too, since he cannot verbalize his feelings or interpret other people’s. As in the autobiography, those suffering from Asperger’s syndrome are represented as unable to tell others how they feel.

In the novel, *aspies* are not portrayed as not having feelings of their own either, but they are represented as unable to express them. Christopher, for instance, kept silent when his father tried to explain to him why he had kept the truth about his mother from him. He felt sick and shut down his memory (Haddon 141). He could not express his fear after finding out his father had not only kept a secret from him, but also killed Wellington. He just ran away from home. He could not even consider why his father did it or if it had made a mistake. He could not make what had happened fit his definition of love (Haddon 109), so he decided his father did not love him. He just thought of himself: “I had to get out of the house. Father had murdered Wellington. That meant he could murder me, because I couldn’t trust him, even though he had said, ‘Trust me,’ because he had told a lie about a big thing” (Haddon 152). *Aspies’* emotions eventually are so overwhelming that they have to take extreme measures, without thinking about how others feel.

The reader, then, is provided with a picture of a manageable situation in the case of *The Girl with the Curly Hair*. He or she gets the idea that *aspies’* lack of comprehension of people’s emotions and interests can be handled. This is not the case in Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Christopher, who represents *aspies’* voices in the novel, is not able to understand others in any way. He is portrayed as a boy who cannot establish any relationship with people who do not have function in his life, like preparing his food or protecting him.

Conclusion

The following hypothesis was suggested at the beginning of this research project: in the novel *The Curious Case of the Dog in the Night-Time*, an exaggerated and stereotyped representation of Asperger's syndrome and its symptoms is given, while in the autobiography *The Girl with the Curly Hair* by Alis Rowe, Asperger's representation is the result of a process of acceptance and introspection. After analysing the literature, this premise has been proved correct.

The representation of Asperger's syndrome varies deeply from one genre to another. Cristopher, the novel's main character and narrator, presents a stereotyped portrayal of a person who suffers from the syndrome. He fits the description of the syndrome presented in a psychology manual in detail. In contrast, Alis, the main character and narrator of the autobiography, depicts a person on the spectrum who has not only accepted her condition, but has also learnt and adopted some traits from people outside the spectrum. She fits the diagnoses, but not all the traits from the syndrome that have been analysed in this research paper are portrayed as if they were copied from a diagnoses manual. Asperger's sufferers are depicted as independent individuals with particular characteristics. That is to say, every person with Asperger's syndrome is different.

This difference between representations is associated with both genres and text producers. As regards genres, the novel is supposed to present the reader a plausible fictional picture of how *aspies* act and behave. This means that in order to make the character realistic enough, every general characteristic of the syndrome is attached to it without considering that every person is different, and that generalizations are developed by professionals only for the sake of diagnoses.

The autobiography, on the other hand, involves a representation of *aspies* that considers individuality. Asperger's syndrome is portrayed as having degrees of severity. The intensity of

its symptoms is represented as a factor that varies from person to person. No extreme research based representation of Asperger's syndrome is conveyed, and the narrator/main character displays an understanding of the illness that results from a process of introspection.

As regards text producers, the author creator and the author person are closely related to each other. This suggests that both Haddon and Rowe play an important role when it comes to conveying meaning and building representations in their literary works. The fact that Haddon (author person) is not an *aspie* has an impact on how the author creator built Christopher in the world of art. This teenage boy is the result of research on the syndrome, which means that only what can be observed and read about the syndrome has been considered, since the author person could not get first-hand experience of what living with Asperger's syndrome means. He meets the characteristics of the syndrome that have been suggested by professionals. This leads to a stereotyped and sometimes exaggerated portrayal of *aspies*, and provides the reader with an imprecise conception of what being on the spectrum entails.

In the case of the autobiography, Rowe (author person) provides the author creator with an insight into the syndrome that is unique since she is an *aspie* herself. Then, the representation of the syndrome is not stereotyped, but based on the experience of living with it. The characteristics of the syndrome analysed in this research paper are portrayed as having different degrees of severity. The gravity of each Asperger's attribute is determined by how each individual deals with the illness throughout their life.

This research contributes to deepening and enlarging the knowledge that exists not only within the field of literary analyses, but also within the field of sociology, since it describes how Asperger's syndrome is conceived by different individuals. However, there are many questions that have not been answered by this research study and that would be important to explore. For example, the use of language of both narrators, Alis and Christopher, is an interesting object of study. They use simple and short grammatical structures, which may or may not be related

to the syndrome. Age could also be a compelling object of study. It could be analysed if the differences as regards the representation of the syndrome are based on the main characters and narrators age difference. Also, analysing both literary pieces from a cognitive linguistic point of view would be a relevant contribution to society. *Aspies* are known for not using metaphors, so how they organise their minds when they have to sort out abstract concepts is an important unanswered question. Finally, these literary pieces could also be approached from an educational point of view. The benefits and drawbacks of including these pieces in a classroom could be studied as well as how they could impact on students' conception of Asperger's syndrome.

Ideally, this work will not only inform but also inspire people to do more research on literature and Asperger's syndrome. As for me, it has been an enriching experience through which I learnt both how Asperger's syndrome is seen and how it is experienced. Outside this research, I have revised and modified my conception of the syndrome, so I hope it has a similar enlightening impact on its readers.

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