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## DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

Vyobrazení postav s poruchou autistického spektra v díle *Podivný případ se psem* od M. Haddona a *Posměšek* od K. Erskine

The Portrayal of Characters with Autism Spectrum Disorder in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by M. Haddon and *Mockingbird* by K. Erskine

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Odevzdáním této diplomové práce na téma Vyobrazení postav s poruchou autistického spektra v díle *Podivný případ se psem* od M. Haddona a *Posměšek* od K. Erskine potvrzuji, že jsem ji vypracovala pod vedením vedoucího práce samostatně za použití v práci uvedených pramenů a literatury. Dále potvrzuji, že tato práce nebyla využita k získání jiného nebo stejného titulu.

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## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato práce zkoumá, jak jsou postavy s poruchou autistického spektra (PAS) zastoupeny v anglické literatuře. Teoretická část práce se zabývá projevem PAS v různých sférách života. Na základě prací z oblasti psychologie, studií zdravotního postižení a anglické literatury jsou představeny pojmy jako autismus a Aspergerův syndrom. V teoretické části jsou představeny hlavní tendence a stereotypy, pokud jde o postavy s PAS v beletrii. Kromě toho jsou v poslední teoretické kapitole představeni autoři analyzovaných románů a jejich motivace k využití disability narratives. Praktická část určuje, zda ztvárnění postav s PAS v románech sleduje symptomy popsané v odborné literatuře. Příznaky pokrývají tři hlavní oblasti, jako je sociální interakce, opakující se a stereotypní vzorce chování, zájmy, aktivity a idiosynkratický jazyk používaný postavami. Jazyk protagonistů, kteří jsou zobrazeni ve vybraných literárních dílech, vyjadřuje specifickou poruchu a přispívá k lepšímu pochopení výzev jedince s Aspergerovým syndromem. Kromě toho jsou porovnávána zobrazení postav v románech Erskine a Haddona, aby se zjistily společné rysy a rozdíly v zobrazení jednotlivců s PAS v britské a americké literatuře.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Poruchy autistického spektra, Aspergerův syndrom, K. Erskine, Posměšek, M. Haddon, Podivný případ se psem

**ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates how characters with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) are represented in English literature. The theoretical part of the work addresses ASD manifestations in different spheres of life. Based on works from the fields of psychology, disability studies, and English literature, such concepts as autism and Asperger syndrome are introduced. In the theoretical part, main tendencies and stereotypes as to characters with ASD in fiction are presented. Besides, the authors of the analysed novels and their motivation to utilize disability narratives are displayed in the last theoretical chapter. The practical part determines whether the portrayal of characters with ASD in novels follows the symptoms described in specialised literature. The symptoms span three main domains, such as social interaction, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour, interests, activities, and idiosyncratic language used by characters. The language of the protagonists who are depicted in the selected literary works conveys the specificity of the disorder and contributes to a better understanding of the challenges of an individual with Asperger syndrome. In addition, the portrayals of characters in Erskine's and Haddon's novels are compared in order to ascertain common features and differences in the depiction of individuals with ASD in British and American literature.

**KEYWORDS**

Autism spectrum disorder, Asperger syndrome, K. Erskine, *Mockingbird*, M. Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

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## **Introduction**

In recent decades, there has been an increase in the number of studies concerning autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in psychology, psychiatry, medicine, and education, as well as in literary works depicting characters with ASD. The rise could originate from the tendency of society towards understanding ASD. Additionally, it could be influenced by a greater number of students with ASD including in general education classes together with their peers (Black and Tsumoto 45-46).

My first experience of interaction with people with ASD was connected with my cousin Yuriy. Understanding his worldview, reality, and attitudes to other people was always a subject of great interest to me. The desire to understand and help people with ASD was strengthened during the school practice when one of the students had Asperger syndrome. The facts mentioned above contributed to examining literature concerning people with ASD, including novels. The reason is that some novels introduced important issues from “the culture of autism” to a wider audience and “allow us a glimpse into the autistic world” (Bates 51). As a result, the theme for the thesis was discovered.

This thesis aims to analyse the portrayal of people with ASD in a mystery novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by Mark Haddon (2003) and a young adult novel *Mockingbird* by Kathryn Erskine (2010).

The novels selected for the thesis met the following criteria:

1. The novel is written in English.
2. The main character of the novel is a person with symptoms of autism or Asperger syndrome.
3. The novel is told from the perspective of a character with ASD, which allows to follow the life of a person directly experiencing ASD.
4. The novel is written after 2000 and provides current conditions of life for a person with ASD.

The selection process was based on the investigation of materials published by researchers specialised in psychology and psychiatry. Several researchers labelled protagonists from *Mockingbird* and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* as characters with ASD (Black and Tsumoto 52, Bates 47).

In the thesis, the following questions are investigated:

1. Does the portrayal of characters with ASD in novels follow the symptoms described in specialised literature?
2. How is the language of the characters with ASD represented in the novels?

3. What are the similarities and differences in the ways of depicting ASD characters' spheres of life by M. Haddon and K. Erskine?

The theoretical part is devoted to the historical overview of the appearance of autism spectrum disorder, terminology concerning autism and Asperger syndrome and its symptoms, depictions of ASD in English language literature, and introduction of the selected authors and novels.

The practical part analyses the story of Christopher from Haddon's book and Caitlin from Erskine's novel in order to answer the research questions. Relying on the specialised literature, basic ASD symptoms are discovered. Moreover, the language used by the characters and various aspects of their physical behaviour (reactions to stress, relationships with other characters, and sensitivity) are revealed in this part of the thesis. In addition, the portrayal of these characters is compared to investigate some common and different features in creating a person with ASD in selected literary works.

## **Theoretical Part**

### **1. Autism Spectrum Disorder and its Symptoms**

#### **1.1 Historical Background**

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a “neurodevelopmental disorder that affects communication, social interaction, and behaviour” (Alnasser 116). Autism was first described in the early 1940s by Leo Kanner, a child psychiatrist at Johns Hopkins University Medical School in Baltimore, Maryland. Kanner described a group of children who demonstrated specific behavioural traits, such as “extreme social isolation, communication difficulties, and ritualistic behaviours” (Bruey 31). Kanner’s observations and descriptions have played a crucial role in the development of a new diagnostic category. As a result, many of the features that he outlined are incorporated into diagnostic standards used today.

What is more, the term “autistic” was created by Kanner, who took inspiration from early cases of individuals with schizophrenia who were immersed in their own world. Consequently, there was a long-standing misconception for many years that autism and schizophrenia were connected disorders. The reason was that when autism was first identified in childhood, it was common for those children to be re-diagnosed as schizophrenia in adulthood (Bruey 31, Ousley and Cermak 2).

While Kanner correctly suggested that autism is caused by brain abnormalities, other experts at the time supposed that the emergence of the disorder was provoked by inadequate parenting. In the 1940s to 1960s, Bruno Bettelheim assumed that certain children viewed their environment as hostile and frightening as a result of poor parenting. Those feelings led to the formation of special traits, such as social isolation or communication problems. One of the treatment strategies was “parentectomy”, which involves removing the children from their parents in order to cure autism. However, this approach to treatment did not decrease the autistic symptoms; rather, it increased parental feeling of guilt and confused the child (Bruey 31).

By the 1970s, removing children with ASD from their parents was no longer the recommended course of therapy. The society recognised that “parents were essential members of the treatment team rather than the cause of their child’s developmental differences” (Bruey 33).



## 1.2 Symptoms of Autism Spectrum Disorder

Modern scientists and psychiatrists proved that symptoms of ASD are characterised by a high level of heterogeneity since they cover several spheres of life. The symptoms of autistic spectrum disorder are observable before three years of age. Early warning indicators may consist of “disinterest in snuggling as an infant” or “absence of initiating eye contact spontaneously or with prompting” (Bruey 51). In connection with that, it is worth noting that several signs of ASD may already manifest in infancy.

According to Todd Eckdahl, the most common early signs of ASD may be divided into several groups based on age. At the age of six months, the signs of ASD include not making eye contact, the absence of responding smiles, and not expressing “joy with smiles, laughter, and body movements” (Eckdahl 6). A twelve month-child with ASD may not babble or coo, not use “communicative gestures, such as pointing or waving goodbye”, and not answer when called by name (6). At the age of 16 months, warning indicators include not using words, repeating strange motions with the body, including flapping the hands and arching the back. The last group of early signs of ASD is devoted to children of two years old and covers not using original little phrases and preference for playing alone (6).

Among the characteristics of older children, teenagers, and adults with ASD, the triad of symptoms includes qualitative impairments in the development of social skills and in communication, and the presence of ritualistic, repetitive activities and interests (Bates 47, Bruey 50, Eckdahl 2). The Doctor of Psychology, Carolyn Bruey, demonstrated a basic system of diagnostic criteria for autistic disorder:

1. “Qualitative impairment in social interaction” (52):
  - A notable impairment in utilising non-verbal cues to regulate social interaction is evident. These elements of non-verbal behaviour include maintaining of eye contact, facial expressions, body posture, and gestures. Children with ASD often deal with “flat affect” which means static and unanimated facial expressions during social interactions. This feature is also accompanied by difficulties in initiating conversation through such gesture as raising arms.
  - Inability to establish age-appropriate peer relationships and a disinterest in interacting with other children are other characteristic traits of individuals with the condition. Children with autism spectrum disorder frequently prioritise interaction with adults, recognising their ability to fulfil essential needs such as food, drink, and assistance.

- Difficulties with spontaneous sharing of enjoyment, interests, or achievements with other people are reflected in a lack of showing, or pointing out objects of interest (53).
  - Deficiency in social or emotional reciprocity is manifested as disinterest in interacting with others, social detachment, and an inability to comprehend the emotions and feelings of other people. In connection with that, people with ASD may smile at their thoughts and not be able to empathise with others.
2. “Qualitative impairments in communication” (54):
- The development of spoken language is either completely absent or delayed, and there is no attempt to compensate for that through alternative modes of communication such as gestures or mime.
  - A noticeable impairment in initiating and maintaining of a conversation with others is observed even among those people with ASD who possess adequate verbal skills. Though individuals with autism spectrum disorder may demonstrate an extensive vocabulary and proficiency in verbal expression, they often have limited functional use of language, especially within a social context. For example, some children can recite long passages from books, but struggle to respond appropriately when they are asked: “How are you?”. In addition, the intonation of their speech may not match the content and manifest in a manner described as a ‘robot-like’ voice.
  - “Stereotyped and repetitive use of language or idiosyncratic language” (56):
    - a) Some people with ASD demonstrate “echolalia” which is a tendency to repeat phrases they have recently heard immediately or later.
    - b) “Pronominal reversal” is another language peculiarity when a person refers to herself/ himself in the third person instead of using the pronoun “I”. Many children with autism later grasp the concept of pronouns and improve their ability to use them appropriately in context.
    - c) The next characteristic in this category of symptoms is the development of idiosyncratic words or phrases for communication.
    - d) Some individuals with autism may repeat strange sentences that seem out of context but in this way, they are expressing their wish to start social interactions. Moreover, children may permanently pronounce definite words because they enjoy the sound or the sensory experience of making the sound.
  - The absence of interest in diverse and spontaneous play or social imitative play is another sign of autism spectrum disorder. Children with ASD are typically not interested in activities involving social communication within a play context, but demonstrate

proficiency in concrete, isolated play activities such as completing puzzles or stacking blocks. They frequently manipulate toys in unusual ways as they do not understand how these things should be used. In addition, the process of playing is rather ritualistic.

3. “Restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour, interests, and activities” (58):
  - Obsession with one or more limited, stereotyped routines that are abnormal in terms of concentration or intensity. Autistic children frequently have an obsession with one or two topics or items.
  - Inflexible adherence to particular, non-functional routines or rituals (e.g., one person tapped the wall as he left a room and appeared to feel more secure after doing so). Overreaction to changes in the routine or environment is another characteristic feature of people with ASD.
  - Stereotyped and repetitive motor movements, such as hand or finger flapping, twisting, or engaging in complex whole-body movements like toe-walking, head-weaving, or facial grimacing are commonly observed. People with ASD find these movements pleasurable because of the sensory input or sense of calm they provide.
  - Persistent preoccupation with object components. Individuals can examine the object closely, trying to study more about particular parts of it. For example, some people with ASD enjoy staring at or rubbing shiny surfaces (Bruey 59).

### **1.3 Autism and Asperger Syndrome**

In connection with autism, the term ‘Asperger syndrome’ is worth mentioning because both disorders have common features. A year following the publication of Kanner's first research about autism, the Austrian doctor, Hans Asperger, proposed an additional autism-related disorder. In 1944, Asperger coined a phrase “autistic psychopathy” that was rather similar to the term ‘autism’ to characterise the social issues some children had, although he was not aware of Kanner's study. This disorder was later called as Asperger's disorder or Asperger syndrome (Goldstein, Ozonoff 17).

Existing research demonstrates various opinions concerning similarities and the overlap between autism and Asperger’s disorder, such as “core impairments in socialisation, communication, and imagination” (Macintosh and Dissanayake 421). Overall, “based on the evidence to date, the validity of Asperger’s disorder as a unique syndrome, separate from high-functioning autism, has not yet been either conclusively established or refuted” (431). Considering that the distinctiveness of Asperger’s disorder has not been conclusively established, its “inclusion as a separate diagnostic category in the classification systems...

appear somewhat premature” (432). Based on the current evidence, it may be prudent for clinical practice to adopt the broader category of autism spectrum disorder, while also specifying the most relevant subtype (i.e., autistic disorder or Asperger’s disorder) (432).

However, based on the research findings, it seems that there are some qualitative differences between high-functioning autism and Asperger’s disorder (AD). According to T. C. Bruey, research regarding Asperger’s disorder is limited. Nonetheless, certain patterns have been identified. For example, Asperger syndrome is more common in boys than in girls, much like autism disorder (61). As Asperger’s disorder does not include cognitive impairment in its diagnostic criteria, a child with it typically has a better prognosis than a child with another autism spectrum disorder (62). Adults with AD are frequently able to live independently, despite the possibility that they will always demonstrate some peculiar tendencies (such as social awkwardness or obsessions with specific topics).

Children with AD rarely experience communication delays, but they may have peculiarities in their language use. For instance, the child can make comments without realising that the listener lacks the necessary context for comprehension (63). Additionally, some formal phrases and speech from movies, commercials, and video games tend to be in the language of people with AD. They insert these phrases in social situations that initially appear appropriate, while individuals with autism may repeat words from movies out of context.

As for the symptoms of Asperger syndrome, they may be divided into two groups: “qualitative impairment in social interaction” (64) and “repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour, interests, and activities” (66). Even though these two categories sound similar to some symptoms concerning autism, some differences will be revealed in the detailed explanations of every category further.

#### 1. Qualitative impairment in social interaction:

- Individuals with AD frequently struggle to react appropriately in social interactions. In addition, there is either no eye contact or “staring at others”. They often have flat facial expressions and demonstrate little emotional response in social interactions. Children with AD frequently struggle to respond to “physical signs of affection such as hugging” (65).
- A large number of people with AD are not interested in establishing friendships with their peers, or they may interact with others in a very rule-governed way with strict

standards of how everyone should behave. Additionally, when interacting, they can use peculiarly formal language.

- Compared to individuals with autism spectrum disorder, those diagnosed with Asperger syndrome often tend towards self-absorption, especially regarding their specialised interests. When they had a desire to discuss their hobbies with others, they typically do so in a robotic, one-sided manner rather than engaging in a conversational exchange (e.g., by providing a long list of facts about the subject). Individuals with Asperger syndrome may appear disinterested in others' interests and redirect the conversation back to their concerns (66).
- Individuals dealing with AD can demonstrate a limited understanding of societal norms, particularly concerning the feelings and needs of others. They might laugh for instance, when someone is crying. People with Asperger's Disorder typically struggle to interpret subtle social cues from others, such as when someone glances at their watch to indicate it is time to leave. Although comments made by individuals with AD may initially appear rude, they are often simply stating facts and do not intend any harm.

## 2. Repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour, interests, and activities:

- AD is characterised by a strong concentration on specific topics, leading to long hours of study and discussion of the topic. Researching and learning of an extensive amount of information about relatively complex subjects, like geography or space exploration, may be pleasant to people with AD. With time, older AD children and adults typically learn to identify these obsessions and make conscious efforts to regulate their behaviour.
- Individuals with AD sometimes insist on performing quite complicated or time-consuming rituals, for instance, “placing plastic dinosaurs in a sophisticated pattern every morning before the school bus arrives” (67).
- In contrast to the repetitive body movements of people with autism, “the behaviours seen in people with AD tend to be more subtle and less obtrusive”.
- Although some people with AD are preoccupied with parts of objects, this tendency is generally less intense than for people with autism (Bruey 68).

Analysing the works mentioned earlier, the following conclusion may be made: autism and Asperger Syndrome are distinct disorders, yet both fall under the broader category known as

autism spectrum disorder. This explains the presence of both differences and similarities in symptoms across these conditions.

## **2. Representation of Autism Spectrum Disorder in Literature**

### **2.1. Autism and Narrative**

In literature and various media resources, autism is a constituent of the wider field which is called “disability narratives”. The dominant tendency in this kind of narrative is connected with a shift from the portrayal of disability to the overcoming of the challenges that happened as a consequence of this impairment. The plot of the ‘overcoming’ narrative includes people demonstrating their moral character throughout the struggle, communities getting insight from the sufferings of the oppressed person, and prevailing humanity (Murray xvi). As a result, both the characters and the readers should encounter a kind of spiritual growth.

The ‘overcoming’ narrative is characterised by its dominance in the representation of people with impairments and creates an impact that other ways of portraying these individuals are impossible. “If those with disabilities don’t struggle against the limitations of their conditions and make us all the richer for it, then what exactly is the story?” (Murray xvi). Autism seems to meet all the requirements of these popular narratives. Characters with ASD usually have a journey from point A which is autistic otherness to point B, complete neurobehavioral normalcy. The idea of the movement to the deletion of the impairment is popularised in ASD narratives. However, this approach builds inadequate representations of the nature of the spectrum as a condition which may always be overcome since in reality most people with autism or Asperger syndrome struggle with its influence throughout their whole life. In addition, the popularity of the ‘overcoming’ narrative in society makes the impairment itself “compellingly attractive in the way it presents human otherness” (Murray xvii). The reason is that autism appears to illustrate “otherness in the extreme”, something that is beyond present scientific knowledge and out of a public idea of the rational. As a result, literary works, films, and blogs about ASD people became the subject of great interest for the public.

In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in the involvement of images of children with ASD in the media. This tendency may be explained by the growing interest and curiosity that autism has created in contemporary audiences. Consequently, the condition’s current profile in books and films becomes closely related to the image of an autistic child.

However, this tendency did not exist in the 1960s in the UK. Even though autism was a diagnosable disorder, general population was not familiar with it. Many autistic children were

formally classified as “psychotic” or having “childhood schizophrenia” (Murray xvii). Even in terms of political and educational policy, the condition was uncertain. Before the Chronically Sick and Disabled Person Act of 1970, children with disabilities had to undergo testing before the age of five in order to assess “whether they would benefit from being taught” (Murray xvii). It means that some people with ASD were labelled as “non-educable” and were forced to stay at home or were sent to special centres. In these centres, the staff usually lacked the education which is necessary for teaching. As a result, it led to the situation when a part of the population with autism did not have the right to be educated. This situation demonstrates the general lack of awareness about the spectrum in the 1960s culture and explains the absence of ASD in any cultural narratives of the time. The Act provides society with more information about the condition and contributed to the future raise of awareness of the disorder in society.

In the USA, people have started to pay more attention to individuals with ASD since 1990. In this year, the Americans With Disabilities Act was published. It promoted the appearance of disability rights movement and disability studies (Loftis 3).

As for the contemporary reception of ASD, the spectrum is viewed as a source of curiosity, as well as a factor causing “worry and fear” (Murray 3, Loftis 4). The reason is that the disabled body or exceptional intellect often need some corrections or demand an explanation. Its distinction from the norm is itself a cause for concern for some people, an obvious example of what can “goes wrong” (Murray 3). Autism seems to be an entity which is difficult for identifying since the spectrum is too broad. It includes different levels of severity and a range of manifestations in many spheres of life. This characteristic makes it complicated to locate ASD accurately in the existing system of disorders. This complication is a recurring theme in a large number of news reports and fiction. Therefore, autism functions as a specific type of disability and its specificity reflects in the narratives which are popular in society. It means that understanding the interactions between ASD and narrative is significant.

The investigation of how ASD is portrayed in cultural narratives is conditioned by the increased interest in autism in recent years. “Often the relationships between depictions of autism in the media and the condition itself is highly artificial” (Murray 4). The condition of autism may be located between its strict, objective descriptions in medical research case studies and the sentimentalised news media narratives or fictional works depicting it. It is debatable whether the remarkable increase in autistic narratives in modern culture – novels, films, and magazine articles – has resulted in changes in the general public’s understanding of the

spectrum. Rather, the creation of new literary works or films reflects the desire of a society get more information about the topic which is still not fully comprehended.

Each kind of disability, including autism, has been the subject of debate and examination in the fields of medicine, psychology, and education. Books that explore the various forms of impairment and their effects on people and their environment are now on many library shelves. However, we lack experience in observing how particular cultural interpretations of disability affect their diverse subject matters.

Considering the previously mentioned facts and tendencies, it is possible to make a conclusion that nowadays, ASD is a condition that has gained attention and popularity in society. It is the current topic of interest, existing in various cultural contexts and causing a range of emotions – from nervousness to surprise. The change of attitude towards autism in society is reflected on the narratives realised in different types of writing.

According to Stuart Murray, the following types of writing on autism are distinguished:

1. Factual writing

These texts are produced for the general audience. They focus on explaining diagnostic criteria to a larger readership and examination of consequences for individuals and society. In addition, the direction of these works may be connected with making some concepts related to neurology and humanity understandable. The factual writing includes “parents and the professional” books that are written to educate and advise parents concerned about their children’s development (Murray 7). These books “have nothing to say about the multiple popular narratives of autism” (Murray 7).

2. “Inside” narratives

These narratives are produced by individuals who have autism in different forms: memoir, blog, or fiction (Murray 14). A counterpart is a literature from various specialists to inform, educate and provide guidance on the nature of the condition. One of the key points of “inside” narratives is the idea of presence (Murray 32). Characters with ASD may occupy different positions: a role of a prosthetic figure in the background that is necessary to support other plot lines; or central figure. The position of centrality and agency means that a character is located in the narrative foreground. Consequently, he/ she may influence the definition of terms through which he or she is seen. Depending on how readers interpret these kinds of narratives, they can develop an understanding of autism that goes beyond institutional or medical settings (Murray 33). Life narratives as a genre encourage an engagement with the reader, partly due to the



manner they present the peculiarities or limitations of individuals with ASD. These texts, however, demonstrate subjectivity and agency that can function according to the preferences of their creators (Murray 34). For instance, the publication standards for written life stories emphasise the necessity for disclosure and the overcoming narrative since these are the stories that are sold. It leads to unreality of the accomplishments of situations and achievements of the characters described in fiction or non-fiction based on life stories.

To conclude, the examination of interaction between the attitudes to ASD in society and narratives is significant for understanding of the disability. The development of images of characters with ASD has its own historical eras: from the period of ignorance to the distribution in various spheres of life and art, including literature. As for literature, such limited factors as publication standards or needs of the audience may have an impact on the events described in literary works. In addition, R. Black and C. Tsumoto suppose that “stories told through movies and novels may not be representing the full range of strengths and weaknesses of those on the autism spectrum” (5).

## **2.2 Autism Spectrum Disorder in Fiction**

Although literature has only recently described different aspects of autism and Asperger syndrome in detail, misconceptions of these conditions are pervasive in contemporary Western literature and popular culture. The original and proper descriptions of the disorders were given by Leo Kanner and Hans Asperger as late as the early 1940s, but there have been many fictional characters with autistic traits earlier.

According to Gordon Bates, literary representations range from such quiet and emotionless geniuses as Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes to the innocent, naive characters whose function in the story is to serve as a mirror to the social moral or the injustices in the world (47). The second group may be illustrated by Bartleby from *Bartleby, The Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street* written by Herman Melville in 1853 and Boo Radley in *To Kill a Mocking Bird* published by Harper Lee in 1960. Moreover, in comic writing, different facets of the autistic mentality are used as a source of humour. For example, “pompous and pedantic Mr Pooter” in *Diary of Nobody* (1892) by George and Weedon Grossmiths (47). So, we can conclude that the creation of characters with ASD symptoms has a long history and started at least in the nineteenth century.

However, it is uncommon to find characters in novels who demonstrate the whole triad of core symptoms of autism disorder, such as “impairment of language, socialising and a preference for routine” (Bates 47). As a result of the recent rise in diagnosis rate and the public’s

exploding interest in Asperger syndrome in particular, fiction literature started to include more thorough and realistic representations of ASD. Contemporary stories also reflect a shift in how society views people with autism. There is a movement from characters who were viewed as players of silent and supporting roles to independent and bright individuals.

Tharian R. P. and other scholars investigated another tendency concerning fiction with ASD characters. This tendency is connected with the limited representation of women with ASD in literature. Most of the autistic protagonists are men. However, observations indicate that there is an increase in a number of female characters represented in books.

Based on the academic research, some writers portray characters with features that are “highly recognised to be part of the autistic spectrum” (Tharian et al. 14). The authors write about their experiences with attempts of masking traits, sensory overload, stereotyped or repeated actions, lack of eye contact, and peculiar mental processes. They raised important topics including challenges in getting a diagnosis, therapy, school experience and so on. Strong female characters with ASD who were successful in their careers, and in family life are also included, along with positive perspectives on their diagnosis. This variety of topics and feeling of authenticity may result from the fact that many literary works written by people with ASD or with family members who live with the disorder. It means that people write from their experience and want to encourage the representation of autistic characters in fiction.

The next tendency in terms of ASD in fiction is connected with the avoidance of explicit labelling characters with ASD. There are numerous instances where the readers have hypothesised whether characters have ASD or not; furthermore, the authors have not addressed this matter directly. This situation concerns not only female characters with autism or Asperger Syndrome in fiction, but also the male ones. For example, over ten million copies of the book *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time* (Haddon 2003) and its stage adaptation have been viewed, making Asperger Syndrome understandable for a wide audience (Tharian et al. 15). However, the author noted that ASD was never specifically mentioned in the book, despite the information appearing in some promotion materials.

There have been several explanations for the tendency mentioned in the previous paragraph. The first one is that writers who are evasive in naming of the disorder do not have any obligation to depict the manifestations of it accurately. The second reason is that the absence of a diagnosis minimises the offence caused to persons with the disorder and even allows to add some ironic commentaries through the remarks of other characters.

When writing about portrayals of Autistic Spectrum Disorder in fiction, it is worth noting that not all fictional characters are depicted according to scientific theories (Tharian et al. 17). Some literary works may include outdated issues, such as the connection between ASD and cold parents. Certain portrayals may be explained by the historical context in which they were produced. They indicate that the authors express the prevailing scientific paradigm.

Simultaneously, fictional works with characters with autism spectrum disorder play a significant role since they can “challenge assumptions, myths and stereotypes, and reduce stigma” (Tharian et al. 19). Above all, the accuracy of portrayals is a meaningful issue because they promote further discussions and create an image of a person with ASD in society.

### **2.3. Autism and Asperger Syndrome in Children’s Literature: Approaches, Stereotypes, and Problems**

In contemporary classrooms and educational settings, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of children diagnosed with ASD. Notably, boys are identified at a significantly higher rate, with one in 42 boys and one in 189 girls being recognised as having ASD (Black & Tsumoto 4). The significant piece of information about ASD for the general population is primarily facilitated through visual media. For instance, for more than a quarter of a century, the 1988 film *Rain Man* has served as a seminal reference point for understanding ASD within the broader cultural discourse (Black & Tsumoto 46). Stuart Murray mentions that *Rain Man* remains the foundational cultural work that most effectively portrays ASD, and it plays an important role in popularising awareness of the disorder (12). Moreover, “documentaries, news reports, parenting guides and parent autobiographies fill bookshelves and the internet” (Black & Tsumoto 4).

The popularity of works containing characters with ASD may be observed in literature aimed at readers of different ages including children. According to Charlene Weaver, two approaches to working with children’s literature on the topic are applied (28). One of them is connected with redefining characters from old literature which was written before ASD was properly researched. Relying on this approach, the investigation of autistic characters may be broadened to such well-known literary works as *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* containing figures who were ‘suspected’ to be on the spectrum. However, the reliability of these ‘suspicions’ is questionable. The second approach concerns finding and analysing the characters who were clarified as people with ASD. The writers who chose the second way created many children’s books where autistic identity and experience play a

meaningful role in plot development. As a result of realising both approaches, scholars seem to agree on two points based on their assessment of disability characters in children's literature:

1. Although many different kinds of 'othered' characters with varied backgrounds have been attempted to be included in modern children's books, more appropriate and authentic portrayals are still needed (29).
2. Positive understanding and awareness of disability can be fostered by children's literature that presents disabilities thoughtfully and authentically. This can lead to a more inclusive environment outside of children's books (30).

It is worth noting that the representation of characters with ASD and its influence on creating a positive understanding of disability varies according to different factors, for instance, the positioning of the characters and the presence of stereotypes connected with ASD in a literary work. As for the first factor, it is crucial to remember that various positions of characters can have an impact on creating the associated expectations for them. Charlene Weaver distinguishes such roles as "a narrator, a focaliser, the main character, a supporting role, or an object of description" (37). The point of view for the events in the literary work is known as the focaliser. That point may be located outside the fabula or associated with a character. The character will play a more significant role if he/she coincides with the focaliser (Weaver 38). By watching through the eyes of the character, the reader will presumably be more likely to believe in the perspective presented by this person. However, when the whole story is told in an autistic voice and when the world and the events in the story are reflected in the eyes of an autistic person, the reliability of this narration may be questioned. In the research of children's literary works, the following tendency is visible: when autistic narrators are viewed as unreliable, readers tend to distance themselves from them. Simultaneously, when they learn about the autistic character's peculiar perspective on the world or self-centred thought process through the author's description of the ASD traits, readers may sense the author's presence and control over the entire plot more strongly (39).

The literary strategy used by authors to build 'suspense' in narrative development is frequently realised in the purposeful use of an unreliable narrator. The uncertainty of the novel keeps readers interested as they search for misplaced or confused pieces of information to solve the puzzle and get the full picture. As a result, readers come to the conclusion that the surface story presented by an unreliable narrator foreshadows a deeper level of story that is purportedly more important and closer to the core. However, this literary approach is frequently misdirected when the narrator is depicted as being on the autistic spectrum (Weaver 40).

In addition, the characters with ASD in children's literature frequently continue to be "the focalised" or "the objectified" when the narrative is told from the perspective of non-autistic characters. For example, in *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962), Charles Wallace has never been officially diagnosed as having autism spectrum disorder, although his portrayal may lead people to the opposite opinion. The writer Madeleine L'Engle describes the peculiarities of Charles Wallace's language and communication problems through Meg's memory (41). Consequently, the narrator is semi-omniscient; she describes the world of the character with ASD through the eyes of another protagonist, Meg.

Certainly, it is impossible to determine how empowered autistic characters will be relying only on their placement in the text. Nevertheless, the existing research emphasises that the various roles of autistic characters within children's stories may have an impact on the way of portraying individuals with ASD and perceiving them by readers.

The second factor influencing understanding of ASD is connected with the stereotypes introduced in the book. In children's literature, three main stereotypical patterns are distinguished, according to Charlene Weaver: ASD as Othered, ASD as Incomplete, ASD as Inspirational. From the normative standpoint, autistic characters are viewed as othered, just like other popular disability characters. The gap between the autistic and non-autistic characters widens as the narrative highlights and repeats the non-normative traits that define ASD. This process is observed in different genres. Picture books, for instance, *Crow Boy* (1955) by Taro Yashima, frequently employ excessively exaggerated visual salience to highlight the various characteristics of autistic characters. Novels for children such as, *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962) by Madeleine L'Engle, also draw readers' attention to the peculiarities of autistic characters through the descriptions of scenes and conversations with their participation.

Concerning the second stereotype, autistic personalities are depicted as people with an incomplete, not fully realised state of being. The reason is that ASD is viewed as a barrier that keeps them from forming healthy interactions with people and society. The portrayal of Colin in Frances Hodgson Burnett's novel *Secret Garden* (1911) illustrates the oversimplified interpretation of disability as an imperfect state of human nature. When the character with ASD isolated himself in a room, his only option was to irritate others around him (Weaver 45). As a result, this position prevents them from being accepted as fully functioning members of society.

The third stereotype is connected with viewing disability as a kind of illness that causes problems and leads the disabled characters and non-disabled characters around them to spiritual growth. Charlene Weather illustrates this assumption with the story of Auggie in R. J. Palacio's

*Wonder* (2012). Auggie motivates his parents, his sister Olivia, his sister's friend Miranda, and his friend Jack. Moreover, at the end of the book, his inspirational influence affects the entire school (47). So, the story of Auggie demonstrates the pattern when the illness of the character serves as inspiration for herself and surrounding people.

Using the two mentioned approaches to the analysis of children's literature with autistic characters, modern researchers made conclusions about the significant influence of this kind of literary works on creating images of people with ASD in readers' minds. The extent to which the character with autistic spectrum disorder has an impact on readers depends on the positioning of him/her in the text or on the inclusion of stereotypes in the narration.

The next part of this subchapter will be devoted to the problems of ASD in young adult fiction. According to Robert Rozema, ASD characters in young adult fiction should be portrayed realistically and positively (26). The realistic criterion implies that a book must adequately portray the qualities of the disability, in line with accepted professional literature and practices. As for the second factor, positive representations of people with disabilities in literature must include some or all of the following characteristics:

- a) realistic emphasis on strengths instead of weaknesses;
- b) setting high expectations;
- c) portraying ASD characters as positive contributors who help other characters to improve;
- d) becoming self-determined;
- e) receiving full citizenship in the family and community;
- f) fostering reciprocal relationships.

However, when it comes to portraying autistic adolescents in young adult fiction, there are particular challenges in presenting them in a realistic and positive light.

#### 1. The problem of realism.

Most young adult novels accurately depict the symptomology of autism spectrum disorder in their portrayals of individuals with the illness. Numerous writers are experienced at working with autistic children, frequently including their own, which is why their characters demonstrated typical behaviour linked to ASD.

However, like other neurodevelopmental disorders, autism spectrum disorder manifests itself in a variety of ways in different individuals. Due to the range of symptoms, the autistic person may be nearly indistinguishable from his/her friends without ASD, while another man may have

identifiable autistic features such as significantly impaired verbal skills and repetitive hand flapping or other movements and rituals (Rozema 27). So, the autism spectrum is wider than it is reflected in some novels. Nowadays the latest definition of the autism spectrum purposefully broadened. For instance, the Asperger syndrome previously viewed as a separate, milder type of autism was included in the term autism spectrum disorder, which now refers to the full range of disability.

## 2. The problem of positivity

As for conveying positivity in young adult literature, it is worth noting that there is a popular among adolescents' subgenre "dark fiction". It raises such topics and portrayals of human behaviour as drug addiction, sexual abuse, self-harm, violence etc. Young adult fiction has traditionally been connected with these issues. Psychoanalytic theory suggests that dark fiction offers teenage readers 'psychological containers' (29) or safe spaces where they can discuss culturally taboo themes.

Despite the widespread appeal of dark young adult literature, there are no dark young adult novels that feature individuals with autism. Their portrayal of teenagers with impairments is often supportive. Characters with ASD frequently use their special cognitive abilities to solve mysteries, win girls, and mend broken relationships. For instance, in the romantic comedy *The Half-Life of Planets* (2010), Hank, a senior in high school, has Asperger syndrome. Hank developed an obsession with his father's record collection after his untimely death. As a result, he started to work in a record store and met a girl who found him interesting. The novel closes with Hank performing a guitar solo at Beachfest, something he would not have been able to do without the help of his new girlfriend Lianna (29). Hank's ideal teenage male fantasy was realised: he successfully achieved goals in all the spheres of his life.

In this genre of literature, characters with ASD are depicted as engaging in fully developed interpersonal relationships, often culminating in positive outcomes. Moreover, these narratives accentuate themes of individual empowerment and self-determination. In connection with that, they present people with ASD only in a positive light and cause the second major problem mentioned earlier – the problem of positivity. On the one hand, young adult literature may counteract the negative preconceptions connected with people with developmental disabilities. Moreover, people with the same disorder can be familiar with inspiring reflections of their own images through books. On the other hand, there is something restricting about these novels conveying the "autistic kids are really quirky but are capable of saving the world" message (Rozema 30). Their portrayals are too limited in books or films, but these characters serve to

play multiple roles: winners and losers, heroes, villains, angels and demons, just to name a few. Adolescent literature would acknowledge the diversity of the ASD community by allowing teenagers with ASD to have rich lives on the page. It is thus possible to conclude that portraying characters with ASD in young adult fiction deals with two main problems: lack of realism and overpositivity manifesting in one-sidedness and typical images.



### **3. Authors and Novels Selected for the Analysis**

#### **3.1. Mark Haddon and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time***

Mark Haddon is a British novelist and poet. The writer received his education at Oxford's Uppingham School and Merton College, where he specialised in English. He is best known for the murder mystery novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* about a boy with Asperger Syndrome. The book was published in 2003 and became a bestseller. It is the only book to be concurrently published in two versions: for adults and children. The novel has won numerous prestigious awards, for instance, the Whitbread Book of the Year in 2004 (The Guardian 2004).

The choice of the topic is explained by Haddon's experience in working with people with variety of disabilities, including autism and Asperger Syndrome. In portraying Christopher, the main character, the writer relied on his personal experience rather than on medical literature (The Guardian 2004).

It is worth noting that the author did not mention explicitly in the book that the main character is a person with Asperger Syndrome. However, the back cover blurb claims that Christopher has this disorder. Moreover, different researchers view Christopher as an individual with ASD (Bates 47, Murray 12, Tharian 15). The tendency not to label the disability of the character is one of the features of contemporary fiction with ASD characters (Tharian 15).

*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* consists of 51 chapters. Each chapter is marked by number. The numbers and the order of the chapters do not match. For instance, the first chapter is called "2". The events are narrated from the perspective of Christopher Boone, a fifteen-year-old teenager. Without having a label of the disorder, Christopher, who resides with his father, tells us everything we need to know about how his mind functions. It is a "Black Day" if he observes four yellow cars. But five red cars mean that the day is "Super Good". Christopher finds it intolerable to be touched. He is sometimes so overwhelmed with verbal and visual stimuli that he starts to scream. The novel is narrated as a detective story which is Christopher's favourite genre. By investigating the murder of the dog, Christopher not only moves outside his zone of comfort, but also discovers the secrets that his neighbours and family have long kept hidden.

#### **3.2. Kathryn Erskine and *Mockingbird***

Kathryn Erskine is an American writer of children's literature who is The National Book Award winner. One of her famous novels, *Mockingbird*, was published in 2010. It tells a story of Caitlin

with Asperger Syndrome. According to Haight's interview, the selection of this topic is conditioned by personal motivation: the author's daughter has the same disorder (2012). While she was writing the book, the shootings at Virginia Tech occurred. The writer was deeply affected by this event and decided to write a book about a girl with ASD who lost her brother in the same incident. Erskine aimed to demonstrate how a child with Asperger Syndrome can comprehend and deal with such a loss.

The author tried to display Caitlin's thoughts and day-to-day activities of a young person with Asperger Syndrome correctly. She conducted a lot of research on the topic of ASD which included reading, attending workshops, and speaking with parents and educators of students with the syndrome (Haight 2012).

The story is told from the perspective of Caitlin, a fifth grader, who has lost her elder brother Devon, and this event has completely reshaped her world. Caitlin has Asperger Syndrome and does not view the world as other people. She adheres to routines and finds safety in them. The girl perceives her brother as a main source of support and her best friend. He was the person she could always address for clarification on any matter until he passed away. As a result, Caitlin returns to the work with favourite dictionaries and has to find the definition of the word "closure". In the novel, the girl is in search of closure, since, in her opinion, this is what she and her father need.

As for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* and *Mockingbird*, the practical part will analyse its literary characters with ASD. The practical part will aim at the discovery of answers on the research questions mentioned in the introduction.

Existing studies of selected novels are devoted to the analysis of a large number of literary works and their comparison with each other (Bates, G., Black, R., Tsumoto, C., Murray, S.). For this purpose, the researchers preferred to investigate the portrayals of characters based on only a few manifestations of autism spectrum disorder. For instance, R. Black and C. Tsumoto focused their examination on three criteria: communication, adaptability, and relationships (48–49). The limited number of traits allows for the analysis of 14 or more novels and the focus on the quantity of the literary works. This thesis introduces a wider investigation based on the depth of the analysis according to all possible manifestations of ASD in different spheres of life rather than on the intention to use a few criteria and as many novels as possible.

In addition, Erskine's novel *Mockingbird* is rarely used as material for the research. However, this work by an American author is a valuable source of information for the examination of the portrayals of the character with Asperger syndrome.

## **Practical Part**

### **4. Accuracy in Symptoms Description**

#### **4.1. Christopher Boone**

Mark Haddon's novel involves the first-person narration, introducing the story of Christopher from his own perspective. Therefore, the assumptions regarding the symptoms are based on the main character's thoughts, ideas, and inner monologue that occupy the biggest part of the book. The analysis of Asperger syndrome (AS) manifestations encompasses two main domains: social interaction and patterns of behaviour.

As for the first sphere, the circle of Christopher's social contacts is mostly limited to several people: his father, mother, and school teacher Siobhan. According to the thoughts introduced in the book, the main character finds the process of communication with other people rather confusing because of the need to look into the eyes of the interlocutor. Christopher is aware of the fact that it helps others to understand what another person feels or what he thinks about. However, it does not work in the same way for the character with AS, it is more like "being in a room with a one-way mirror in a spy film" (Haddon 29). In addition, the inability to recognise other people's emotions hinders successful interaction. While trying to guess what a person experiences, the boy uses the handmade scheme with smiles depicting different emotions. As it was mentioned in the text, happiness and sadness are recognisable, but the same cannot be said about anger or astonishment (Haddon 2). Christopher also provides two reasons why he does not like to interact with other people. The first one is connected with the range of meanings of non-verbal behaviour since even raising one eyebrow may be interpreted in many ways (19). The use of incomprehensible metaphors is another argument for not talking to others.

It is worth noting that the process of communication with unfamiliar people is realised in a fixed way consisting of several stages. The first stage is connected with the observation of a new person's behaviour to understand whether this human is not dangerous. It usually takes weeks before moving to the next step. The second stage is full of questions concerning the plan of the stranger's house and his / her car (Haddon 46). The information based on the answers to these questions seems to be enough to start interacting with the individual.

Christopher's interaction with familiar people is characterised by the absence of tactility. The character with AS demonstrates struggling with such physical signs of affection as hugging or even simple touching movements. In relationships with his parents, giving a hug is replaced with a special gesture: "I held up my left hand and spread my fingers out in a fan and we made

our fingers and thumbs touch each other. We do this because sometimes Father wants to give me a hug, but I do not like hugging people” (21). Moreover, Christopher is not interested in establishing friendships with his peers which is one of the symptoms of Asperger syndrome.

The next characteristic of communication with people with AS is their unwillingness to discuss other’s interests, often redirecting the conversation back to their own concerns. This symptom may be illustrated by the dialogue between Christopher and his mother during the return to Swindon (252). The boy repeatedly raised the topics which were recently discussed but which he still worries about. For instance, he is frightened by the probability of meeting his father who killed the dog. The reason is that the main character decided that his father might want to harm him too. The next important topic was connected with doing Maths A level. Even though Christopher’s mother informed him about postponing the test until next year, the boy repeatedly mentioned this theme later.

The last feature of AS in the sphere of communication spans the misinterpretation of the interlocutor’s feelings and needs. For example, when Christopher noticed his father’s tears following the death of his mother, the boy assumed that the reason for the tears was pity for the dead neighbouring dog.

The second domain of AS manifestations, as was already mentioned earlier, includes behaviour patterns and interests. Asperger syndrome is characterised by a strong concentration on specific topics. In the case of Christopher Boone, these obsessions consist of maths, space exploration, Blue Planet and dislike of yellow and brown colours. The great interest in maths is explained by its safety. With the help of this science, difficult problems may be solved and each solution will be in the form of a straightforward answer in the end. So, Christopher uses the immersion in solving mathematical tasks as a way to abstract from real life since “math wasn’t like life because in life there are no straightforward answers” (78). It is worth noting that the whole novel includes many examples of formulas, geometric figures, and other illustrations connected with a logical way of thinking which is typical of a mathematician. Even the enumeration of chapters has a special order of selected prime numbers. As a result, for instance, parts 1, 4, 6, 9, 10 are absent.

The reason for the appreciation of astronautics is connected with the opportunity to have “own part of the spacecraft which no one else could come into” (65) and to have a mediated type of communication which implies talking to other people only through a radio link-up and a TV monitor. Other reasons are the surroundings which consist of Christopher’s favourite things, such as computers and machines and the absence of yellow and brown objects in a spacecraft.

The topic of stars is raised several times in the detective story. Each time it is followed by detailed descriptions of constellations and their location with illustrations. The main character likes these issues since “it is something you can work out in your own mind just by looking at the sky above your head at night and thinking without having to ask anyone” (12). Christopher, as a representative of people with Asperger syndrome, prefers clear and logical ideas and things which can be seen or touched.

One of the favourite TV programmes is called Blue Planet which is about life in the deepest layers of the ocean. Imagining himself in “a spherical metal submersible with windows” (100) in the quietest and darkest secret places of the ocean is the most attractive part for Christopher while watching videos. So, this preference points to the wish to be isolated from other people and the real world.

The next obsession refers to the colours of surrounding things. The boy with AS provided clear reasons for avoiding yellow and brown. For instance, yellow colour is associated with custard and bananas which probably seem unappetising for the character. Additionally, the name of the colour reminds the dangerous disease from tropical America, Yellow Fever, and yellow flowers causing allergies. Brown awakes memories of a disobedient girl at school with the same surname, dirt and gravy. These associations seem to be enough for refusing to pay attention to yellow and brown things as well as for eating food with similar shades.

The colour preferences are reflected in the ritual realising on the way to school. Every day gets a special label of Good or Bad depending on the colours of the cars in a row. There is even the scale on which the days are located from a Black Day (4 yellow cars in a row) to a Super Good Day (5 red cars). So, the label influences the whole day because Christopher decided not to contact anyone at school and not to eat lunch on Black Days. The only activities were sitting on his own and reading books. The existence of such rituals is also one of the symptoms of AS.

In addition, Christopher’s behaviour is introduced by such repetitive movements as rolling back onto the lawn, pressing his forehead to the ground and groaning. These movements are produced in case of information overload. Based on the text, a similar behaviour may be caused by the following situation: a person gets a lot of information through one or multiple senses. In the novel, the main character experiences an overload of visual, auditory, and tactile sensory channels. Shopping centres and crowded streets immediately provoked the reactions described earlier: “I didn’t like all the people being near me and all the noise because it was too much information in my head and it made it hard to think, like there was shouting in my head. So, I put my hands over my ears and I groaned...” (172). In case of too much pressure due to

processing information from sight, Christopher first relieves the pressure with the help of groaning and then uses definite strategies to deal with it. For instance, while surrounded by lots of tables and signs in the streets of London, he started to calm down by closing his eyes and counting to 50 or by touching the Swiss Army knife in the pocket which made him feel safe. After that, the boy made a little tube with the hand and looked through it, so that he could see only one sign at a time (210). As for the tactile channel, it may be fast overloaded with any touching, especially by a stranger. Reactions to these situations include not only rolling on the ground and pronouncing specific sounds but also hitting the person who touched the boy. This is one of the defensive reactions which was manifested during the dialogue with a policeman about the death of Wellington (9).

Writing about people with Asperger syndrome, it is important to emphasise their strong desire for order. Every situation with a clear order or structure seems safe for such individuals. The same pattern is followed in thoughts and activities of the main character in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Meeting specific rules elaborated by Christopher himself is displayed in different processes, one of which is eating: products should lay on the plate not touching each other. In another way, it will be inappropriate for eating: “Father banged the table with his fist really hard so that the plates and his knife and fork jumped around and my ham jumped sideways so that it touched the broccoli so I couldn’t eat the ham or the broccoli any more” (63). The next rule concerning food is connected with a necessary absence of yellow products.

The definite order should also exist in the perception of time and space. From Christopher’s perspective, space is more understandable since there are maps for orientation. Moreover, a person can always find where he / she put a thing down with the help of imagining a map in the head. As for time, this category is “a mystery, and not even a thing, and no one has ever solved the puzzle of what time is, exactly” (195). The only way to feel safe is to create timetables even on the weekends and holidays which function as “a map of time” (195). For this reason, Christopher created detailed timetables for each day and hung them on the wall.

Additionally, decision-making becomes challenging without a logical structure including all possible solutions and variants. To illustrate it, the main character’s selection of the variant for further living is worth mentioning. To make this decision, the boy created a clear scheme in his head with all possible options: living with Mrs Shears, living with his mother, staying in the garden etc. After that, he mentally crossed out impossible options. It was “like in a maths exam, when you look at all the questions and you decide which ones you are going to do and which

ones you are not going to do and you cross out all the ones you are not going to do because then your decision is final and you can't change your mind" (162). Consequently, the knowledge of mathematics was helpful in that case.

## 4.2. Caitlin Smith

In the novel *Mockingbird* by Kathryn Erskine, there is also the narration from the first-person perspective. The events are presented by the main character Caitlin Smith. However, the author did not involve metafiction and the text is not introduced as a book created by the character, in comparison with Haddon's literary work. Erskine's novel contains memories about the past but the plot is written in the present tense. As a result, the reader has an impact that all the described situations happen at the moment of text perception.

To examine the novel in terms of accuracy in depicting symptoms of Asperger syndrome, it is necessary to pay attention to the same two domains taken to analyse Haddon's novel. They are the following: social interaction and behaviour of the character with AS.

The sphere of social interaction is characterised by several foreground features, one of which is a lack of context for the listener. The person with AS does not always recognise that the interlocutor does not have the information which is necessary for comprehension. This situation may be illustrated by the conversation with Mrs. Brook when she notices cuts on Caitlin's fingers:

*"What have you been doing?"*

*Cutting.*

*What?* It comes out as a scream. Her hand covers her mouth. *Why?* That comes out as a muffled crying moan.

*I need the wood.*

Her hand drops and she tilts her head. *Excuse me?*

*For Closure.*

*Can you explain from the beginning?*

*Yes. I can but it's a long story so I'd rather not"* (Erskine 159).

The next feature concerns the absence of eye contact while talking to another person. The teacher or psychologist who works with Caitlin reminds her about the importance of maintaining contact in this way. However, in most cases, the girl prefers to look at people's ears, hats or something close to a person, but not in their eyes. She started to change her attitude toward eye contact after the meeting with the teacher of art who explained that "*eyes are the windows to the soul. If you look inside the eyes, you can see so much about a person*" (141).



Nevertheless, the first attempts to act in line with these insights were unsuccessful because the process looked like “staring at others”.

At the beginning of the novel, Caitlin’s little emotional response to the interlocutor’s words is prominently evident. The main character with AS struggles with the recognition of other people’s emotions. Every day Caitlin has to work with the Facial Expressions Chart and learn how different emotions are reflected on the human face. “I have looked at that chart about a million times to try to figure out which emotion goes with each face. I’m not very good at it. I have to use the chart because when I look at real faces I don’t Get It” (11). The character diagnosed with AS intends to memorise all possible meanings of non-verbal behavioural manifestations. For instance, when Caitlin looks at the boy rubbing his eyes, she guesses whether he is sleepy or sad. She is sure that this gesture has only two probable interpretations.

As a result of having this peculiar characteristic, the girl sometimes demonstrates a limited understanding of social norms concerning the feelings and needs of other people. Comments provided by the person with AS may be deciphered as rude, but in reality, he/she is stating facts and does not have the intention to harm. This is noticeable in Caitlin’s behaviour when she pronounces “Devon-who-is-dead” (109) while talking to his father. She wants to demonstrate her awareness of the fact that her brother is not alive, but in this way, she hurts her father’s feelings and makes him cry. The same misunderstanding occurs during the conversation with Rachel, the classmate, after the accident with the bike. All the girls tried to calm down Rachel noticing that her face looked fine except Caitlin. Caitlin answers the question about how Rachel’s face looks providing the facts: “*It looks bad. It’s purple and puffy and really gross*” (119). However, when Rachel started crying after the comments, Caitlin decided to say something nice, for instance, that purple is her favourite colour.

The category “the nice things” is interpreted by the girl with AS in her own way. In her opinion, saying something nice may mean a list of several facts about herself. This understanding is demonstrated in the conversation with a stranger in a meeting of the families of the people who were shot:

*“Remember to Look At The Person and say something nice.*

*I don’t Look At The Person but I say nice stuff. I’m ten. My birthday is next month. My favourite colour is purple. My favorite game is Mario Kart...” (134).*

What is more, Caitlin, as well as Christopher, tends to avoid tactility while interacting. Throughout the novel, she describes uncomfortable feelings in her stomach whenever someone

wants to touch her. Caitlin and her friend Michael use a special way of greeting without hugging: holding the hand up, closing and opening it three times. However, there is a kind of exception in the interaction with her father who is the closest person to her after the death of her brother and mother: "...I push my hand under Dad's sweater and feel the warmth of his chest as he breathes up and down...He lets me stay there and pats my head through the sweater. If it's through the sweater I don't mind. Otherwise I don't like anyone to touch me" (9). In this case, tactile contact is allowed but with a barrier in the form of the sweater.

The communication of Caitlin with other people is characterised by her self-absorption which is expressed in several ways. She may suddenly immerse in her inner world, especially when much information comes from outside. As a result, she may seem detached during the conversation: "I hear Dad's voice but I focus on counting. Seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven. And thinking about stuffed animals". "I hear Dad saying my name but he is in another world right now" (20). The next way in which self-absorption is expressed concerns Caitlin's persistence. The girl insists on completing the project with Devon's chest, even though her father informs her about the impossibility of doing that. Despite explanations, she returns to this topic in conversations, wears clothes which remind her father of the Scout project, and even tries to cut wood with the help of the quarter. As a result, the project was finished.

The same persistence appears in Caitlin's interests. Her family notices her obsession with drawing: "Devon says if I went a whole day without drawing I would probably die" (25). However, her passion for drawing led Caitlin to finding friends, participating in group projects and getting excellent school grades. The next field of interest was connected with books. In kindergarten, the character with AS was above the eighth-grade level in terms of reading. In the fifth grade, she can read everything that her father reads. The explanation of love for reading is the feeling of safety and stability which books provide: "You can open and close books a million times and they stay the same. They look the same. They say the same words. The charts and pictures are the same colours. Books are not like people. Books are safe" (34).

The preference for order and stability manifests in everyday life. For instance, Caitlin reacted negatively to eating salad on Thursday since this day of the week always means Pizza Day. According to her opinion, the tradition should be kept even after the loss of her brother. As for food, it should consist of products lying separately on the plate because "it's too hard to see what you have to Deal With if things start blurring together and getting mushy and turning into each other" (23).

The next obsessive interest refers to the study of the human heart and its work. The topic was included in the sphere of Caitlin's interests in connection with Devon's heart stop and death. The girl read many books in the library to find appropriate information and insisted on doing a school project about the human heart even though the topic should refer to animals. This project was the first step on the way to finding closure, the idea of which occupied the girl's mind throughout the whole book. The initial stage included discovering and understanding the meaning of closure. For this purpose, she worked with her dictionary, consulted with the psychologist, and asked her friend to help. The development of this theme led her to the determination of the possible option for closure: Devon's Scout project completion.

Analysing Caitlin's behaviour, it is worth noting that it includes several types of repeated actions. One of them is shaking hands. This reaction usually occurred when the girl was overwhelmed with emotions, as in the situation when she understood how to get to closure. In the classroom, students had the opportunity to use the Internet to search for any interesting topic. Caitlin decided to specify the meaning of the word "closure" and detected the sentence "They finally brought the project to closure" (148). This assumption was associated with Devon's Eagle Scout project. The girl was so impressed that a bright reaction started: "I start shaking my hands fast and my Heart is pounding in my ears and it's hard to breathe and I hear moaning and it must be me because Mrs. Johnson says, *Caitlin are you all right?*" (149). The next specific reaction to the overload with emotions or with information from outside is sucking the sleeve. It helped to relieve tension. Moreover, the level of tension might be predicted relying on sucking of both sleeves or only one.

In case of sensory overload with information from the outside world, Caitlin implied a definite strategy called "stuffed-animaling". For instance, this way of relaxing was realised in recess when the school atmosphere was noisy: "My eyes feel hot and itchy and everything is blurry so I remember an okay thing I can do which is to blur colors and shapes so they change into fuzzy and warm instead of sharp and cold". "If you take the monkey bars and the people and blur them together they get soft and fluffy and kind just like a stuffed animal" (28). Moreover, Caitlin's behaviour in stressful situations is characterised by the tendency to hide under her father's sweater, under the sofa, under the desk, or between the foot of the bed and the dresser.

In spite of definite peculiarities in the behaviour of the character with AS, it is important to mention that Caitlin regularly works on her manners and finesse. As a result, the girl appropriately utilises basic phrases for demonstrating politeness in dialogues, such as "Thank you", and "You are welcome". The teacher who helps Caitlin overcome difficulties caused by

Asperger syndrome often focuses on the development of basic communication skills and meeting politeness principles.

## **5. Contribution of Language to the Depiction of Characters with Asperger Syndrome**

### **5.1. Christopher Boone**

In Mark Haddon's novel, the selection of language contributes to the process of creating the image of the character to a great extent. It realises different functions one of which is the depiction of symptoms of Asperger syndrome. People with AS often demonstrate a range of vocabulary regarding their interests but limited functional use of language, especially within a social context. Christopher produces long passages on the topics which are included in the areas of his interests. On the one hand, the character devotes the whole chapter to ideas about his favourite book, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, reciting parts of the text and providing possible clues and red herrings as to the investigation. In addition, he can explain the reasons for selected numbers in the titles of chapters throughout several pages. On the other hand, the person struggles with maintaining basic conversation with a stranger and pronounces brief sentences that do not always correspond to the context:

She said, 'You'd probably like a dog, wouldn't you?'

And I said, 'I have a rat.'

And she said, 'A rat?'

And I said, 'He's called Toby.'

And she said, 'Oh' (Haddon 52)

The next characteristic feature regarding the use of language is connected with misunderstandings of non-literal meanings or figurative speech. This difficulty is emphasised in chapter 29 where Christopher mentions employing metaphors by people as one of the reasons why he does not like to communicate with them. "I think it should be called a lie because a pig is not like a day and people do not have skeletons in their cupboards" (20). Christopher feels confused with the idiomatic meaning of phrases because, for example, "imagining an apple in someone's eyes doesn't have anything to do with liking someone a lot and it makes you forget what person the person was talking about" (20). In connection with this struggle, jokes are often incomprehensible for the character since many of them are based on multiple meanings of words. The character with AS compares the perception of the word with several meanings with simultaneous listening to different pieces of music which sound like white noise.

Moreover, Christopher's speech is often characterised by not meeting the cooperative principle. He provides more information and details than it is necessary. For instance, the main

character of the novel replies to the policeman's request for age in the following way: "I am 15 years and 3 months and 2 days" (7). In addition, in the middle of a conversation with a neighbour about pets, the boy produced a long monologue about stereotypes concerning rats, the reasons for creating these stereotypes, and how his rat walks and sits without any question from the interlocutor.

What is more, the text of the novel demonstrates Christopher's obsession with several topics. In connection with that, dominant semantic fields may be easily defined. The story was planned as a detective one, however, discussions of mathematical tasks, formulas, and equations or astronautics, stars, and space exploration occupy a great part of the novel. This factor illustrates the immersion of the character with AS in his inner world.

However, the boy tries to write the story in line with another condition for creating interesting texts recommended by his teacher. It is the use of descriptive language to introduce people in the story. Christopher decides to apply the advice and mentions several details about each new person in order to help readers create an image of the described individual. These details sometimes regard clothes, as in Mr. Jeavons's case. Christopher writes about holes in the man's shoes to describe this character. In addition, the boy sometimes starts the depiction of a new person in the story by mentioning his/ her appearance. For instance, the policeman looked "as if he had two mice in his nose" (85). The introduction of an individual in a similar way does not always help to understand the described figure. However, it allows readers to create bright images in mind and understand Christopher better.

The great attention to detail is followed throughout the whole novel. Using language for descriptions, Christopher shows the way he perceives the world, his unique worldview. The boy becomes familiar with someone or something with the help of noticing small features of the subject or object. In terms of people, Christopher observes "what they are wearing, or if they have a walking stick, or funny hair, or a certain type of glasses, or they have a particular way of moving their arms" (97). It helps him to create an image of the human in the brain.

In the novel, he often demonstrates thinking and reasoning by creating pictures in his head, especially pictures of things which happened in reality. In connection with that, Christopher demonstrates the distinction from others. Other people "have pictures in their heads of things which aren't real and didn't happen" (98). The attitude toward the death of mother may serve as a bright illustration of the boy's worldview. He cannot feel sad because of someone who does not exist, unreal someone.

Perceiving the world through pictures, the main character often tries to explain complex processes with the help of similes. Christopher's language is full of comparisons which make issues easier to understand. Experiencing sensory overload is "like when a computer is doing too many things at the same time and the central processor unit is blocked up and there isn't any space left to think about other things" (177). Movements of stars remind "a ball that has been thrown in the air" (13). Attempting to guess what other people think is associated with "being in a room with a one-way mirror in a spy film" (29).

Feelings are also viewed as pictures through the lens of Christopher's worldview. The boy considers feelings as images of what is going to happen in the future, or what might have happened. Sad pictures cause tears, happy ones are reasons for smiling. This idea contains an interesting insight since people often experience negative or positive feelings about possible events in the future and realised or unrealised situations in the past. Similar simple but wise and even motivational thoughts may be found in different parts of the novel. For instance, "in life you have to take lots of decisions and if you don't take decisions you would never do anything because you would spend all your time choosing between things you could do" (106) or "sometimes people want to be stupid and they do not want to know the truth" (113). Such ideas probably contribute to creating a positive attitude toward the character with AS from the point of readers.

Writing about verbal means involved in depicting the person with AS, it is worth mentioning that the novel includes non-verbal information in schemes, illustrations and texts of another genre, such as a letter. Christopher shows his mother's letters in the novel. It is important to note that they include words with mistakes: "maniger", "argumant", "lonley" (Haddon 135). These observations create an impact that these letters were written by a real person who probably was in a hurry.

The last thing regarding the language concerns the deviation in writing such words as Mother and Father from the capital letter regardless of the position in a sentence. In spite of Christopher's outward unemotionality in his attitude toward parents, this factor may mean the significance of these two figures for the main character.

## **5.2. Caitlin Smith**

The language used to create the image of Caitlin plays a significant role in Erskine's novel. It helps to convey Caitlin's AS-related characteristics, as well as her special view of the world

and relationships with the environment. Moreover, the use of language in the novel influences the process of its perception by the readers.

On the syntax level, it is worth noting that the text consists of long clause complexes including many constituents. For instance, “I sigh because I’d rather draw but Mrs. Johnson Looks At The Person hard so I write the letter even though I’m much better at drawing than writing and Mrs. Johnson should know that by now” (Erskine 131). Most clauses contain simple connectives, such as “so”, “and”. Some clauses are verbless and illustrate verbal elision, as in “People from school. Mrs. Brook my counsellor. Miss Harper the principal” (6). Furthermore, the biggest part of the text is written in the present tense. All of the mentioned factors contribute to creating special impacts on readers. For example, while reading the novel, there is a feeling that the described events occur at the moment of reading. Moreover, the features of syntax point to the spoken discourse, as if the main character produces her monologue throughout the novel. As a result, it promotes believing in the real existence of the person with AS who can successfully function in society, cope with problems and overcome barriers caused by the disorder.

Caitlin’s speech has foreground issues that are characteristic of people with Asperger syndrome. One of them is connected with the repetition of several phrases. These phrases are highlighted in the novel with the help of capital letters at the beginning of each word regardless of the lexical item position. Such phrases include Get It, Look At The Person, The Day Our Life Fell Apart, and Deal With It. They are connected with situations with which the character concerns the most. The Day Our Life Fell Apart means the day when Devon was shot at school. Caitlin as a person with AS sometimes has to deal with situations when other people do not understand her (do not Get It). What is more, one of the specific features of her communication with others is avoidance of eye-eye contact, she prefers not to Look At The Person.

According to Caitlin, the most important words should start from the capital letters. This rule functions in creating works at school. That is why some teachers can not understand the existence of capitalised lexical items in different parts of the sentence. The following feedback on the project was provided by Mrs Johnson: “*Why are there capital letters in the middle of your sentences? Common nouns are not capitalised. Only the special words are capitalised*” (62). Caitlin was sincerely surprised by the feedback: “She has put an X over the H in Heart and written a lowercase h. It doesn’t look right that way. I’m sure she’s wrong about the special words and capital letters even though she’s a teacher. How can any word be more special than Heart?” (63). The reason is that the item “special” is understood in a specific way.



Analysing language in the novel, difficulties with the interpretation of non-literal meanings by Caitlin should be marked. Knowledge of another sense of the word is sometimes helpful for understanding at least the connotation of non-literal meaning. When the character's father told her that Caitlin was such a breeze to buy for, she assumed that the phrase meant something positive. "I do know that breezes are nice so it must be good" (93). However, interpretation does not always function in the right way for the character with AS:

*"I heard my grandmother say that he's keeping his head up but pretty soon he's going to crash and burn.*

I turn and Look At The Person. *You mean in a car accident?*

Michael Looks At The Person too. *No. It means he's going to be really bad at something"* (108).

Accordingly, idioms may be incomprehensible to the girl. The situation when Caitlin worked on empathy and heard the recommendation to put herself in another girl's shoes illustrates the special way of interpreting idioms. Getting this recommendation, Caitlin started to inspect the shoes of the person.

Difficulties arise not only with the word in a figurative sense but also with an item with multiple meanings.

*"MISS is a strange word...Have you ever looked it up in the Dictionary? There is MISS like MISS Harper the principal. There is MISS like you will MISS your bus if you don't hurry because you have to step on every crack. And there is MISS like dead.*

*Do you miss Devon?*

*I don't know"* (14).

The same situation is with homophones:

*"I'm only a first grader so I can only do stuff like be a pear.*

*A pair of what?*

*No. A pear. Like an apple"* (195).

The reason is that a person with AS often experiences complications with understanding the context that is why his/ her speech may sound inappropriate. For instance, the individual uses formal English in a friendly conversation with a close person repeating whole phrases from movies or books. Caitlin uses a formal definition of closure to ask her first-grade friend from school about his opinion on this topic. In addition, her answer to the question with an indirect

speech act reflects incompleteness. When Mrs Johnson offers sweets and pronounces “Would you like this candy?” (8), this utterance is interpreted by Caitlin as a question about whether she likes this candy or not.

Writing about the language utilised by the main character with AS, it is important to mention that her speech comprises neologisms which should be explained to interlocutors: TiVo, stuffed-animaling and others. From Caitlin’s perspective, TiVo may be deciphered as the state when “I fast-forward through the bad parts and all of a sudden I’m watching something and I’m not sure how I got there” (12). Stuffed-animaling is a process of coping with bright and mixing colours around by blurring them. Therefore, a correct understanding of such neologisms is impossible without additional explanations from the creator.

Thanks to the language used by the character, readers become familiar with her view of life, her grasping of nice things and strangers. Perception of real life is introduced through the opposition to movies. Caitlin assumes that “a movie is better than real life because in the movies only the bad guys die” (204). The girl prefers films to reality since they provide the opportunity to create happier versions of events or endings without a place for death. Additionally, Caitlin’s comments express her thoughts about nice things. The girl answers the request to say something nice about the person in the following way: “*I don’t think you’re disgusting just because you have hair sticking out of your ear*” (135). What is more, strangeness of the unfamiliar human depends on his ability to draw: “Normally I don’t talk to strangers but if he can draw like this he can’t be that strange” (137).

To conclude, language plays a significant role in portraying the main character with AS in both novels. It reflects peculiarities caused by Asperger syndrome, such as difficulties with understanding figurative speech or the context of the conversation. Furthermore, it contributes to the depiction of an individual worldview, conveys authors’ attitudes to their characters, and influences readers’ perceptions of Christopher and Caitlin.

## **6. Comparison of Portrayals of Haddon's and Erskine's Characters with Asperger Syndrome**

Before the comparison, basic information about the selected protagonists needs to be provided. Mark Haddon's character with AS is a 15-year-old boy, while Kathryn Erskine created an image of a 10-year-old girl with the same disorder. Both children grew up in single-parent families where the main caretaker was a father. In the second part of the novel, Christopher discovered that his mother was alive. The trip of the boy led to the restoration of broken connections with her. In Caitlin's case, the elder brother played an important role in her life. Devon explained to his sister the basic rules of communication and behaviour in society, provided her with a feeling of safety that is especially significant for people with AS. While thunderstorms, fireworks, or other disturbing events, the girl had the opportunity to spend time in a hidey-hole in her brother's room. Moreover, Caitlin described Devon as a person who she could always ask for advice from. So, Devon occupied one of the central positions in Caitlin's world. However, the reader was informed about the position of the brother only through the girl's memories since he was shot at the beginning of the novel.

As for the educational domain, both protagonists attended schools. Christopher described other students at school as people having learning difficulties or special needs, while Caitlin did not mention that her classmates had any peculiarities, with the exception of one boy with autism. What is important is that Christopher planned his future educational activities and set clear goals on the basis of his subjects of interest: "And after I've taken A level Maths I'm going to take A level Further Maths and Physics and then I can go to university" (Haddon 57). Caitlin's thoughts were not connected with future plans but they were in line with her age. Education is a sphere where Caitlin and Christopher have opportunities to develop the topics they are obsessed with: the investigation of the human heart and math respectively. For instance, the female character expressed herself through the project devoted to the structure and functions of the heart and through making illustrations for the group presentation. Haddon's character passed the desired exam. So, both characters demonstrated their abilities, talents, and interests in various activities at school.

In portraying Caitlin and Christopher, the authors paid special attention to manifestations of Asperger syndrome. On the one hand, several common features may be highlighted. Firstly, both characters display problems in the sphere of communication, such as initiating and maintaining the conversation. The reason is that the girl and the boy with AS experienced

difficulties with understanding of the context, that is why their answers sometimes sounded inappropriately (Erskine 159, Haddon 52).

The second common complication connected with AS is manifested in interpreting other people's emotions and gestures. Both characters had to rely on visual aids with facial expressions to understand whether the person was happy or sad (Erskine 11, Haddon 3). Gestures and other features of non-verbal behaviour also cause characters' confusion:

“She points to the girls who are standing in a circle and giggling LOUD. They are bent. *What do you think they're feeling?*

*Like throwing up?*

She Looks At The Person.

*Well they're bending over so much it looks like they are going to throw up.*

*Do you usually laugh a lot just before you throw up?*

*No. I don't. But who knows about them?”* (Erskine 85).

Thirdly, both characters were not interested in friendship, especially with their peers. They mostly communicated with older people, such as parents, teachers, or with younger students. For example, Caitlin's friend is in the first grade while Caitlin is in the fifth one. Moreover, at the beginning of the novel, Caitlin called the dictionary as her only friend (Erskine 41). Haddon's Christopher is also depicted as a person who prefers isolation and spending time alone to finding friends and interaction with people.

Fourthly, both the girl and the boy with AS are portrayed as people who experience difficulties in deciphering non-literal meanings. Christopher mentioned this complication in chapter 29 and labelled it as a reason why he finds people confusing. In contrast, Caitlin is open to working with metaphors. For this purpose, she used her dictionary, asked surrounding people for explanations or tried to create positive or negative associations on the basis of the literal meaning of the word (Erskine 93).

The fifth common manifestation of AS in the lives of characters is the existence of a specific reaction to sensory overload. Christopher started rolling back or groaning while Caitlin shook hands or hid in Devon's room. In both cases, children with AS may react in these ways when a great deal of information from the external world occupies their minds. For example, the boy could groan in a noisy street, the subway, or when someone touched him. Invading personal space causes a strong negative response from both protagonists. The boy could hurt the person

who contacted him. For this reason, characters have their own gestures for greeting close people which do not include physical contact. Christopher used the ritual communicating with his father (Haddon 9). Caitlin utilised a special combination of gestures to greet her friend Michael.

Sixthly, characters are bound to specific rituals or orders, such as eating pizza every Thursday and counting red and yellow cars on the way to school. These regular actions have a significant impact on children. In Christopher's case, the whole day depends on the dominance of one colour since four yellow cars in a row means that he will sit "in the corner of the room all day" (Haddon 68), not eating lunch. In the situation with Caitlin, not ordering pizza provoked a hysterical state of mind and conflicts (Erskine 21). What is more, children have the same preferences for food colours. Products should lay separately on the plate, so that colours do not mix. Additionally, Christopher is obsessed with yellow and red, while Caitlin concentrates on black and white. This focus is observable even in her drawings which are always not colourful.

In spite of several common features in the depiction of characters with AS, there are some differences, one of which is the level of the syndrome manifestations. The peculiarities of Christopher are more severe and prevent normal functioning because they are accompanied by many phobias: fear of eating food from unknown places, fear of strangers, etc. The next discrepancy is connected with the development of characters. On the one hand, Caitlin and Christopher are portrayed as individuals who dealt with loss and serious challenges. The boy was informed about the death of his mother, and the girl discovered that her brother was shot. In each person's life, meaningful changes started with the loss. On the other hand, the most significant development of Haddon's character happened after the discovery of the truth that his mother was alive and sent regular letters. As for Erskine's character, the process of maturing is linked with overcoming of Devon's death and finding closure.

The development of Caitlin is depicted more thoroughly. Readers got the opportunity to follow improvements in many spheres of the girl's life. Kathryn Erskine demonstrates remedying of many Asperger syndrome symptoms. With regard to the recognition of emotions and non-verbal behaviour, Caitlin starts with a total misunderstanding when she deciphered bending because of laughter as throwing up (Erskine 82). The girl moved from attempts to guess possible meanings and learning them by heart (Erskine 57) to fast and correct interpretations: "Dad puts his arms up like he's being arrested. *Okay. Okay.* This means quiet" (Erskine 164). In the sphere of friendships, the initial position of the female character was preferences for TV, computer, and dictionary to real communication. At the end of the novel, she found a new friend, Michael. The girl successfully practiced initiating and maintaining conversations with

the boy, shared her favourite snack, and visited the boy's performance at school. As for the worldview in black and white colours, it was also changed. The female character achieved closure for herself, her father and other people suffered from shooting at school by completing Devon's Scout project. After that, Caitlin's descriptions of events became remarkable for appearing of a blue colour. At the end of the literary work, even her drawings got a chance to be colourful: "I put the sketchbook on my lap and open my new box of colours. Now I'm ready to use them because I figured out how I'm going to draw the whole complete picture. I smile and begin" (Erskine 232).

Concerning Mark Haddon's character, his development was depicted in another way. He matured realising the independent successful trip in search of his mother where Christopher faced with his main fears: noisy places, unfamiliar people, etc. The story finishes with the recovery of connections with both parents, finding a new friend, the dog Sandy, successful passing the exam, and preparation for further educational achievements.

## Conclusion

This thesis is concerned with portrayals of characters with Asperger syndrome in a mystery novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* written by British author Mark Haddon and a young adult novel *Mockingbird* created by an American writer Kathryn Erskine.

The theoretical part outlines terminology connected with autism spectrum disorder which includes autism and Asperger syndrome and its basic symptoms. It contains the historical information about the appearance of characters with autism spectrum disorder in literature and changes of attitude in society to such individuals. This part continues with ASD in fiction and children's literature where two approaches and basic tendencies are described. At the end of the theoretical part, selected novels and their authors are presented.

Taking into consideration the portrayal of characters with Asperger syndrome in selected novels, answers to all three research questions as to the depiction of characters with AS were discovered in the practical part. The depiction of Christopher and Caitlin is characterised by various manifestations of the disorder. The symptoms of AS involved in the portrayal of the characters in Erskine and Haddon's novels span the following domains: interaction, behaviour, intensive interests, and peculiarities in language use.

In terms of communicative impairment, Christopher and Caitlin experience difficulties with interpreting non-verbal behaviour, guessing possible meanings of facial expressions, gestures, and postures. As a result, they are often incapable of recognising other people's needs and, especially, basic emotions. For this purpose, they utilise visual aids with faces expressing different feelings. In addition, both authors display problems with deciphering non-verbal behaviour which sometimes cause characters' responses that do not correspond to the context of communication. What is more, interaction of Christopher and Caitlin with any person in the novels happens without tactility, such as hugging or shaking hands. Instead of that, both characters use special ways of greeting.

With regard to the behaviour and interests of individuals with the syndrome, they are obsessed with concrete topics such as space exploration, math, the work of the human heart, etc. These topics dominate conversations and everyday activities represented in the novels. Moreover, Christopher and Caitlin concentrate on a strict order in their lives. For instance, products on the dish should not be mixed, or pizza should be booked on a definite day of the week. Changes in the ordinary way of life may cause a strong negative reaction.

Answering the second research question which was about the language used in the novels, it is worth noting that the language has several foreground common features. They contribute to the portraying of characters. Firstly, figurative language is avoided in characters' speech since its interpretation takes a lot of effort and causes a feeling of confusion for protagonists with AS. Secondly, the language of Christopher and Caitlin consists of a list of repeated phrases that are mostly used appropriately in sentences but in some cases, they are out of context. For instance, phrases can sound too formal.

To conclude, the portrayal of characters with AS in novels follow the symptoms which were defined in specialised literature and presented in the first chapter of the thesis. They may be divided into three main categories: impairment in social interaction, repetitive patterns of behaviour and activities, and peculiarities in language use.

Accuracy in the depiction of symptoms is one of the common features in both literary works selected for the analysis. Therefore, reading these books may be rather effective for the purpose of better understanding of people with AS and difficulties they deal with. All the facts discovered in the practical part demonstrate the authors' accurate approach to the portrayals of characters with Asperger syndrome which refers to autism spectrum disorder. The common feature of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* by M. Haddon and *Mockingbird* by K. Erskine is connected with depictions of AS symptoms in different spheres of characters' lives, such as friendships, education, communication with people, and language use. In both novels, characters are developing through the story and overcoming problems caused by AS. Global changes in characters started with the loss of close people, such as a brother or mother.

The main difference in portrayals of characters' spheres of life is that Kathryn Erskine's literary work creates the impact of total overcoming of all manifestations of Asperger syndrome by Caitlin. This tendency is called overpositivity because, in reality, it is impossible to cure the disorder to its full extent. As a result, the case of Christopher seems more realistic than Caitlin's life.

Therefore, both literary works address Asperger syndrome and the lives of people with this disorder. However, readers should be aware of the fact that they work with fictional characters that cannot convey the real position of individuals with AS. The reason is that symptoms of AS is truly characterised by a wider range of manifestations with different severity and intensity. Additionally, most symptoms cannot be cured throughout life.



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