

AN AUTISTIC CHARACTER'S CONFLICT IN MARK HADDON'S *THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME*

By:

Cici Andriani Pardede ¹⁾

Selly Roida Samosir ²⁾

Desmalia Purba ³⁾

Darma Agung University, Medan ^{1,2,3)}

E-mail:

cicipardede111@gmail.com ¹⁾

selly.r.samosir10@gmail.com ²⁾

minsontamsar@gmail.com ³⁾

ABSTRACT

This thesis deals with a conflict of an autistic character in Mark Haddon's The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time. The problems of the study are, the kinds of conflict, the causes of the conflict, and the impact of conflict on Christopher, as the main character in Mark Haddon's novel. This thesis applies the qualitative research method. Christopher's internal conflict is suffering from Asperger Syndrome as an autism spectrum disorder which in turn affects his overall behavior because the autism he suffers limits his actions and thoughts. He uses his normative way of making sense of his surrounding and seeks the mysterious death of the dog whereas Christopher's external conflict such as man against man and man against the society. This story emphasizes the different perspective that tells about what the main character gets through compared to people in general. He gets through various trials, gains confidence in his abilities and slowly changes to be more self-sufficient.

Keywords: Conflict, Autism, Asperger Syndrome.

ABSTRAK

Skripsi ini membahas “konflik karakter autis dalam novel Mark Haddon yang berjudul *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Rumusan masalah dalam penelitian ini adalah, apa saja jenis konfliknya, mengapa konflik tersebut terjadi, apa dampak konflik tersebut terhadap tokoh utama dalam *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* karya Mark Haddon. Skripsi ini menggunakan penelitian berdasarkan metode kualitatif. Konflik internal tokoh utama adalah menderita Sindrom Asperger sebagai salah satu gangguan spektrum autisme yang pada akhirnya mempengaruhi perilakunya secara keseluruhan karena kecacatannya membatasi tindakan dan pemikirannya. Dia menggunakan cara normatifnya untuk memahami dunia dan mencari kematian misterius anjing sebagai konflik eksternal dari karakter utama yaitu manusia antara manusia dan manusia antara masyarakat. Cerita ini menekankan kepada pembaca perbedaan perspektif yang dialami tokoh utama dibandingkan dengan orang kebanyakan. Dia mengatasi berbagai cobaan yang dia hadapi, dia mendapatkan kepercayaan pada kemampuannya dan secara bertahap menjadi lebih mandiri.

Kata Kunci: Konflik, Autisme, Sindrom Asperger.

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature and psychology are closely related to human life. Psychology deal with human behaviour and mental process, including emotion, cognition, intelligence, human perception, personality, attention, motivation, brain functioning and so on which often shows the psychological symptoms of each individual, which will vary from one individual to another. To examine the psychological problems, then the psychology field is used. Literary works are often associated with the field of psychology, because consciously or not, the writer uses the psychological approaches to support the analysis.

Conflict is part of human life that must be faced. Human behaviour and mental processes have a big role when conflict begins. Conflict may exist as problems with physical safety or shelter, or it may be reflected through quarrels among family members, friends or lovers. Conflict does not always have negative impact. With the conflict, we can get the best solution for every problem happening in our life.

The conflict is found in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. The analysis is focused on the conflict of the main character. The novel is told in the first-person perspective by a 15-year-old boy, Christopher John Francis Boone, who suffers from Asperger Syndrome.

Autism is a developmental disorder characterized by difficulties with social interaction and communication, and by restricted and repetitive behaviour.

One of the autism syndromes is Asperger's Syndrome when you meet someone who has Asperger's syndrome, perhaps you notice two things directly. They are just as clever as other people, but they have more difficulties with social skills. Asperger's syndrome is technically no longer a diagnosis on its own. It is now part of a broader category called Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). This group of related mental health issues shares some symptoms.

In the story, Christopher's mother had died two years ago, so Christopher lived with his father, Ed Boone. Finding his neighbour's dog was killed, Christopher did self-

investigation to track down the killer, Christopher's father went furious about it, then he took Christopher's detective book away. Needing his book, Christopher searched and finally found it in his father's room, but Christopher also found some envelopes. Christopher was surprised because they were from his mother who lived in London. Finding Christopher's felt very bad because he lied to his son when he found out that Christopher read the letters. He apologized and confessed that it was him who killed the neighbour's dog. After knowing the truth that his father had lied to him, Christopher made up his mind escape and went to London to look after his mother.

The writer is very interested in analyzing this novel because it describes the great adventure and struggles of a child with Asperger's Syndrome who is very inspiring to overcome the conflict. People need to pay more attention to people who have autism, where the role of parents is very important.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

There are some relevant theories that are used for conducting this study, they are literature, conflict, types of conflict, autism.

a. Literature

To understand more about more about literature, the writer would like to show a quotation by the experts. According to Taylor (1981:1) "Literature is a creativity, which supply information as well as the aesthetic value, like art. The information in the literary works maybe about the social problems, the history or even psychology while the aesthetic found in the literary works is the way the author arranges the words, so the reader will not get bored in reading them".

Another theory about the definition of literature, Hudson (2006:10) mention that: "literature is the vital record of what men have seen in life, what they have experienced of it, what they have thought and left about these aspects which have the most immediate and enduring interest for all of us".

Based on definitions above, the writer can conclude that literature is a result of the mind, experience and imagination as outline in beautiful words that will have an effect on our

life. Literature concerns with all the aspects of human life and the universe in their entirety, surely, every work of literature is about something and the more a person reads the better stocked will his mind be with knowledge, we can understand and analyze situation or problems that occur in social life.

b. Conflict

Conflict is a part of human life that must be faced. It is a process which happened in our life which involves some people or group of people who challenge each other which has inviolacy impact. Conflict must happen in human life. Conflict does not always have a negative impact. With the conflict, people can get the best solution for every problem that happens in human life.

According to Crow (1968: 236) conflict occurs when a person's ideas, feelings and emotion respectively are pursuing his or her outlets in the psychic life. Therefore, facing some conflict in life will increase appreciation of the respective and responsibilities. Conflict can also be defines as the result of clashes of personalities. While Luken (2003:99-100) says that conflict is a struggle against opposing forces, occurs when the protagonist against an antagonist, or opposing force. On the other hand, conflict is an internal or external struggle between the main character and an opposing force.

Conflict happens because of a few diverse characteristics. The contrasts can be physically, knowledge, customs, belief, etc. by these differences. Conflict gets to be a conventional thing for each community. We are able to conclude that no one has no conflict in this world. Indeed for the conflict between himself or with another person that lives encompass himself. Conflict itself will never lose until the end of time until that community itself gets to be misplaced.

A conflict, one of the elements of literature, plays an important role in fiction, whether it is a drama, a novel or short story. The conflict affected by the difference in trite that brought individuals in an interaction. The differences among them are concerning physical characteristics, intelligence, knowledge, customs, beliefs, and so on.

c. Types of Conflict

According to Riskin (2012:24-25), there are two types of conflict that will be discussed in this study, they are Inner and outer conflict.

a) Internal Conflict

Internal conflict is the dilemma facing the character inside and its impact on that character. Internal conflict is a private war within oneself. It could be anything from deciding between two or more choices, to deciding many things in our personal life.

An internal conflict comes from within the character, based on problems and issues stemming from his or her past that creates trouble for them when dealing with other characters, Internal conflicts as a struggle between competing elements within the characters, aspects of his/her personality may struggle for dominance. These aspects may be emotional, intellectual, and moral. Such conflicts typically leave the character indecisive and agitated. When such conflicts are resolved, the solution may be successful or unsuccessful.

Internal conflict is the issues a character faces, an issue that requires a personal opinion or decision. These difficult decisions must be concluded with a definite conclusive decision.

b) External Conflict

External conflict indicates conflicts affecting two or more parties in the physical world. External conflict is the conflict between two persons or groups, in one of which the hero is the kind person. External conflicts are divided into three types:

a. Man vs. Man

Man vs. Man is when there is a conflict between two forms of like beings. An example is the hero's conflict with the central villain of a work, which may play a large role in the plot and contribute to the development of both characters. There are usually several agreement/disagreement before the climax is reached. The conflict is external. Person vs. person can usually be expressed when a child is being ridiculed by a bully.

b. Man vs. Society

Man vs. Society is a theme in fiction in which a main character's or group of main character's main source of conflict is social tradition or concepts. In this sense, the two parties are; a) the protagonist(s) b) the society of which the protagonist(s) are included. Society is a whole.

For examples, Martin Luther King Jr. speaking out against segregation, Mahatma Gandhi encouraging non-violent protests and a loner struggling to fit in at school.

c. **Man vs. Nature**

Man vs. Nature is the theme in literature that places a character against forces of nature. Many disaster films focus on this theme, which is predominant within many survivals in remote locales. Sometimes all the characters in the book are the good guys and the conflict in the book is between all the people and forces of nature that are out of the characters control. In this case the character faces a problem with some forces of nature such as cold, storm, radiation.

e. **Autism**

According to Durig (1996:63), Autism is an early-onset condition that is usually diagnosed between the ages of three and five. People become labeled as autistic (1) when they are seen by significant others as strangely unable to participate in social life in a normative fashion and (2) when they are subsequently diagnosed by professional as conforming to the conventional profile of autistic behaviour. Furthermore, Williams and Wright (2004) mentioned that the first three years of a child's life is the common period when Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) becomes noticeable. There are three types of autism spectrum disorders:

1. **Autistic Disorder**

This is sometimes called "classic" autism. It is what people think of when hearing the word "autism". People who suffer from the disorder of autism usually have language delays significantly, social and communication challenges, and unusual behaviors and interests. Many people with autistic disorder also have intellectual disability.

2. **Asperger Syndrome**

People with Asperger syndrome usually have milder symptoms of autistic disorder. They might have social challenges and unusual behaviors and interests. However, they typically do not have problems with language or intellectual disability.

3. **Pervasive Developmental Disorder – Not Otherwise Specified**

This is sometimes called "atypical autism," or PDD-NOS. People who meet some of the criteria for autistic disorder or Asperger syndrome, but not all, maybe diagnosed with a typical autism. These people usually have fewer and milder symptoms than those with autistic disorder. The symptoms might cause only social and communication challenges.

3. **RESEARCH DESIGN**

In this study, the writer conducted a qualitative methods as a method to process this analysis by finding suitable data from the novel which can be analyzed based on the topic being discussed. Qualitative method directs research to compile the data gathered during the field research into a case study report. The report gives a complete picture of the hiring process as observed as in the field study.

The statements of problems of the study which relate to conflict of the main character are formulated as follows:

1. What are the kinds of conflict found on the main character in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*?
2. Why do the conflicts occur to the main character in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*?
3. What is the impact of conflict on the main character in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*?

The data were collected through the following procedures:

1. Reading and comprehending the novel Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.
2. Collecting some reference books from Darma Agung University Library,

Yayasan Pengembangan Persahabatan Indonesia Amerika Medan (YPPIA Medan), Gramedia Book Store and Public library of Medan and also accesses the internet in order to supporting data.

3. Finding out the conflict and the cause in the main character.
4. Choosing and categorizing the data dealing with conflict
5. Rechecking the whole data to decrease or avoid falsity.

4. DISCUSSION

This study deals with the conflicts that occur on the main character which show in the novel. In analyzing the conflicts found through the main character, the writer used qualitative method and the applied data are taken based on conflict with happens in the character's life. Library research was done to collect some data in order to emphasize the opinion in the thesis.

In analyzing the data, the writer applied Riskin theory. There are two types of conflict that will be discussed in this study, they are internal conflict and external conflict.

A. The Main Character's Conflicts in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

In literary work, conflict can be divided into two parts, they are internal conflict and external conflict. In this novel, internal and external conflict can be found through Christopher's point of view as the main character in the novel. It can help the reader know easily Christopher's character and also his feeling or emotion in dealing with conflict. Perhaps, a character struggle with an problems of emotion such as fear of intimacy or abandonment. While external conflict is the conflict between one character and another or group. In this novel, Christopher has inner and outer problems.

Christopher's internal conflict who suffers from Asperger Syndrome as one of the autism spectrum disorders which have social challenges and unusual behavior and interests but he typically does not have trouble with language or intellectual disability. He uses his normative way of making sense of the world and seeks the mysterious death of the dog. He

also finds out that his mother is still alive. That condition brings him to a considerable incident to solve the mysteries. While External conflict of the main character, Man vs Man; Christopher between Mrs. Shears as his neighbors, Christopher between Police, Christopher between Ed Boone as his father, Christopher between Judy Boone as his mother.

a. Internal Conflict

Internal conflict is within the main character's mind. Internal conflict can be described as a struggle between opposing forces of desire or emotions within a person. Internal conflict can include troubles with decision making, personality traits, spirituality or physical disabilities. In this story, Christopher has internal conflict that will be explained in this data. He is suffering from Asperger Syndrome as one of the autism spectrum disorders. He is in conflict with himself because his disabilities limit the actions and thoughts that he can make, which in turn affects his overall behavior.

It can be seen from the character of Christopher experiencing many obstacles that must be faced. He has his own perspective on everyday life experienced.

b. External Conflict

External Conflict is a conflict between a character and an outside force. In the novel Christopher has external conflict as follows.

1. Man vs. Man

From the beginning of the story, Christopher tells that he is difficulty in understanding the expressions of face and body language of normal people.

Christopher asks Siobhan as his teacher to explain the meaning of people's faces through the form of images. This shows that Christopher gets problems understanding facial expressions. This inability to emphasize is one of the most prominent features of autism-related disorders, and this characteristic as well as a few others.

Then his teacher, Siobhan, explains to him the meaning of several facial expressions. This fact is a proof that shows an autistic

person is hard to apprehend the meaning of facial expressions.

Christopher is scaring when people shouted loudly because it annoyed him. He feels like people would hit or touch him which is it makes him uncomfortable with the situation and also he prefers to stay untouched. So he is trying to avoid the screams from Mrs. Shears because it scares him.

2. Man vs. Society

a. Christopher between Mrs. Shears as his neighbors

The conflict happens when Christopher finds Mrs. Shear's dog is murdered by someone. Christopher is trying to see what happens to the dog. But suddenly Mrs. Shears sees him and she thinks that Christopher has killed her dog, even though Christopher does not murder Wellington.

Knowing that Mrs. Shears is angry Christopher decides to put the dog, on the law. In this case, Christopher tries to avoid conflict with Mrs. Shears by putting the dog on the law and moves back two meters. This means Christopher wants to reduce the tension between him and Mrs. Shears, so that Mrs. Shears stops her shouting.

b. Christopher between Police

The conflict between Christopher and the policeman is a sequel from the conflict between Christopher and Mrs. Shears. A policeman and a police woman arrive after Christopher faces the conflict with Mrs. Shears. The policeman asks many questions which make Christopher confused and cannot answer the questions from the policeman.

The policeman asks the questions to Christopher quickly. He does not know that Christopher is suffering from autism which makes him hard to understand spoken language. What the policeman says to Christopher makes Christopher stressful and he does not know what to say to the policeman because he needs a lot of time to understand what the policeman says. Bryna Siegel explains that most autistic children have "selective hearing" which means an autistic

child responds to something like a jingle but no to others.

For autistic children, words or phrases once heard may not reappear increasingly or ever again. This is why they have difficulties in understanding spoken language. Christopher cannot quickly understand what the policeman says. It is because he has difficulty in understanding spoken language. Then, it can be seen that Christopher's difficulty in understanding spoken language leads him into a conflict with a policeman.

Christopher cannot answer the question, the policeman decides to grasp Christopher and it makes Christopher angry and hit him. The policeman decides to arrest Christopher for assaulting him. In this case, it is obviously seen that Christopher cannot control himself. So, he hits the policeman and it makes the tension between them is getting worse.

c. Christopher between Ed Boone as his father

Christopher also faces conflict with his father. Christopher's father wants Christopher to stay out of other people's business. It means that Christopher should not try to find the murderer of the dog. However, Christopher has a plan. He wants to investigate the murder of dog. He considers that the dog is important but his father has a different opinion. It makes Christopher involved in a conflict with his father. The conflict between them can be seen from the conversation between Christopher and his father below.

d. Christopher between Judy Boone as his mother

Living with his mother does not mean that Christopher can avoid conflict with people around him. Christopher also faces conflicts with his mother. The conflict happens because Christopher wants to do his A math level exam soon and it means that he has to go back to Swindon, a city where his father lives. But, his mother has a different opinion. His mother wants to postpone Christopher's examination until the following year. It is because the situation is really complicated. If she accompanies Christopher back to Swindon, it means that she has to leave her job in London.

This fact makes Christopher upset but he cannot do anything to realize his dream to do his A Math Level examination this year. It makes him feel painful. His mother also has no solution that can solve the problem between them. An autistic child is uninterested in doing things to please his parents or others. He is uninterested to learn a new thing to earn attention or approval of other people. An autistic child has low desire to please other people and low response to social praise. Christopher also has this characteristic. It can also be seen when he persists to do his A math level test, even though his mother has told him to do it the following year. Christopher's persistence to do his A math level test shows that he ignores his mother decision. But, since he is in London, it is difficult for him to realize his desire to do his A math level test in Swindon, Christopher's hometown. So he really needs his mother approval and help to realize his desire. It can be said that Christopher's lack of social and emotional reciprocity has a role in the conflict between Christopher and his mother.

B. Causes of the Main Character's Conflict in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

Christopher John Francis Boone is the main character in this novel that often emerge in every palaces and time, from the beginning until the end of the story, he always faces many conflicts. In the novel, it is found some conflicts to create the dynamic of Haddon literary work in order to attract attention and impression of readers and gives the moral values of life.

1. Frustration

Many of the characters in the novel become irritated with Christopher at one time or another because of the difficulty they have communicating with him. Christopher has trouble understanding metaphors.

He also has difficulty with nonverbal forms of communication, such as body language, facial expression, and even the tone of someone's voice. He tends to take statements literally and requires very specific

instructions in order to follow a command. He says, for example, that when people say "Be quiet" they don't specify how long he should be quiet for. Consequently, other people often struggle to make Christopher understand them since their normal way of speaking is not successful to deliver intention to him. These exchanges underscore how Christopher's condition affects his social skills, and they emphasize for the reader the difference in perspective that Christopher experiences compared to the average person.

C. The Impact on the Main Character Facing the Problems in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.

Christopher's defining characteristic in his inability to imagine the thoughts and feeling of other people. This condition has made him extraordinarily gifted in math and science but severely underequipped socially, leading Christopher to frequently misunderstand other people, especially his father. Although Christopher does not mention autism by name anywhere in the novel, we see that he recognizes the ways he differs from most people and feels keenly aware of these differences.

As Christopher overcomes the various trials he faces, he gains confidence in his abilities and gradually becomes more self-sufficient. This process culminates in a difficult journey to London that Christopher undertakes by himself, a feat that represents a significant triumph for him since he has never traveled by himself. At the end of the novel, Christopher feels he has overcome his challenges, and he feels ready to be on his own.

5. CONCLUSION

After analyzing conflicts in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, the findings of the analysis were as follows:

1. This study has a conflict that is faced by the main character in the story. There are two conflicts faced by the main character. They are internal conflict and external conflict. This conflict also carries on within the individual himself. The main

character leads the reader to his way of thinking as an autistic teenager. The internal conflict of the main character has certain characteristics. He is in conflict with himself because his disabilities limit the actions and thoughts that he can make, which in turn affect his overall behavior. While External conflict of the main character such as man vs. man and man vs. society.

2. This conflict also carries on within the individual itself. The main character leads the reader to his way of thinking as an autistic teenager. While External conflict of the main character such as Christopher between Mrs Shears as his neighbours, Christopher between Police, Christopher between Ed Boone as his father, Christopher between Judy Boone as his mother.
3. The causes of conflict in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is frustration.
4. The impact on the main character facing the problems in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* overcomes the various trials he faces, he gains confidence in his abilities and gradually becomes more self-sufficient.

6. REFERENCES

- Crow, L. D. 1968. *Psychology of Human Adjustment*. New York: Alfred A. Kopf.
- Haddon, M. 2004. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. London: Vintage
- Hudson, W. H. 1981. *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*: New Delhi. Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (P) Ltd.
- Lukens, R. J. 2003. *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature Person Education*. United States of America : Macmillan.
- Riskin. L. L. 2012. *The Negotiation Within. Harvard* : Harvard Negotiation Law Review.
- Taylor, R. 1981. *Understanding the elements of Literature: Its Forms, Techniques*

and Cultural Conventions. California: Macmillan.

Williams, C., & Wright, B. 2004. *How to Live with Autism and Asperger Syndrome: Practical Strategies for Parents and Professionals*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.

Internet Sources:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Autism>.
(Retrieved February 19, 2020)