Deixis and Fictional Minds

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ABSTRACT

In this essay I show how marked patterns in the use of deictic expressions in literary texts can contribute to the projection of fictional minds that appear to work in "nonstandard" or "unorthodox" ways. More specifically, I suggest that the inherent "egocentricity" of deictic expressions can be exploited to represent strikingly "egocentric" fictional minds. I discuss in detail two examples from different genres: the poetic *persona* in Ted Hughes's poem "Wodwo", and the first-person narrator in Mark Haddon's novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. In each case, I point out the presence of patterns in the use of deictic expressions that can be described as idiosyncratic, and I argue that these patterns interact with other textual phenomena to contribute to the impression of a fictional mind that works in a striking and distinctive way. My claims about the idiosyncratic use of certain types of deictic expressions in the two texts are supported by automatic quantitative comparisons with relevant larger corpora.

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Introduction

In this essay I show how marked patterns in the use of deictic expressions in literary texts (e.g. "I", "you", "this", "that") can contribute to the projection of fictional minds that appear to work in "nonstandard" or "unorthodox" ways (see Leech and Short, Margolin). More specifically, I suggest that the inherent "egocentricity" of deictic expressions can be exploited to represent strikingly "egocentric" fictional minds. I begin by locating this study against the background of recent work on fictional minds in narratology and on mind style in literary stylistics. I then discuss in detail two examples from different genres: the poetic *persona* in Ted Hughes's poem "Wodwo" and the first-person narrator in Mark Haddon's novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. In each case, I point out the presence of patterns in the use of deictic expressions that can be described as idiosyncratic, and I argue that these patterns interact with other textual phenomena to contribute to the impression of a fictional mind that works in a striking and peculiar way. The creation of such minds is an important part of the significance and distinctiveness of both texts. My claims about the idiosyncratic use of certain types of deictic expressions in the two texts are supported by quantitative comparisons with relevant larger corpora conducted by means of the online corpus-comparison software tool Wmatrix (http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/wmatrix/).

Fictional minds

The notions of "consciousness", "mind" and "mental functioning" have recently come to occupy centre stage in narratology, and particularly in the work of narratologists who draw from cognitive science in order to account for the characteristics and comprehension of fictional narratives (e.g. Herman D., Zunshine). Fludernik has proposed that the essential characteristic of narrative is not the presence of a plot, but the presence of the consciousness of an anthropomorphic protagonist, through which actions and events are filtered (see also Lodge). More specifically, Fludernik defines "narrativity" in terms of "experientiality", namely "the quasi-mimetic evocation of 'real-life experience'" (Fludernik 13), and adds that:

> since humans are conscious thinking beings, (narrative) experientiality always implies – and sometimes emphatically foregrounds – the protagonist's consciousness. Narrativity can emerge from the experiential portrayal of dynamic event sequences which are already configured emotively and evaluatively, but it can also consist in the experiential depiction of human consciousness *tout court*. (Fludernik 22)

In *Fictional Minds*, Palmer has boldly stated that "narrative fiction is, in essence, the presentation of fictional mental functioning", and hence that the study of the novel "is the study of fictional mental functioning" (Palmer, *Fictional Minds* 5). Palmer adopts a broad definition of "mind," which includes emotions, beliefs and dispositions as well as cognition and perception (*Fictional Minds* 19). More importantly, Palmer has drawn attention to phenomena that had traditionally been neglected in the study of narrative fiction, notably the presence of a wider range of textual indications of mental functioning than is captured by traditional accounts of thought presentation, and the tendency for much fictional mental functioning to be socially shared or "intermental", rather than individual or "intramental" (see also Palmer, *Social Minds in the Novel*).

Margolin similarly argues that, in order to make sense of fictional narratives, readers or listeners have to attribute to characters human or human-like "cognitive mental functioning". In addition, Margolin points out that literature often explores fictional mental functioning beyond what is conventionally regarded as "normal":

> What is probably even more significant is the preference of much literature for nonstandard forms of cognitive functioning, be they rare or marginal, deviant, or involving a failure, breakdown, or lack of standard patterns. (Margolin 287)

In literary stylistics, similar observations have been made by scholars who have studied the variety of linguistic patterns that contribute to the projection of the distinctive "mind styles" of characters, narrators or authors. The notion of "mind style" was originally introduced by Fowler (*Linguistics and the Novel*):

> We may coin the term "mind style" to refer to any distinctive linguistic representation of an individual mental self. (Fowler, *Linguistics and the Novel* 103)

> Cumulatively, consistent structural options, agreeing in cutting the presented world to one pattern or another, give rise to an impression of a world view, what I shall call a "mind style". (Fowler, *Linguistics and the Novel* 76)

Leech and Short subsequently proposed a cline from "normal", "natural", "uncontrived" mind styles at one end, to, at the other end, "unusual" mind styles, "which clearly impose an unorthodox conception of the fictional world" (Leech and Short 151, 188-189). By and large, studies of mind style tend to focus on narrators and characters that fall at the "unorthodox" end of the scale, such as, for example, Lok in Golding's *The Inheritors* (Halliday "Literary Style", Leech and Short, Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*), Benjy in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (Leech and Short, Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*), and Bromden in Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Semino and Swindlehurst).

Boase-Beier suggests that what characterizes the notion of mind style is "a consistent stylistic pattern in the text as evidence of a particular cognitive state" (Boase-Beier 263-4), and applies the concept to the analysis of poetry and its translation. Boase-Beier is particularly concerned with authorial mind styles, but recognizes that "in speaking of the poet we mean an implied poet, who, like Booth's 'implied author,' is recreated by the reader from the textual evidence' (Boase-Beier 255). This is consistent with the view, expressed for example by Easthope and Vimala Herman, that poetic voices are best seen as textual constructs, which arise in the interaction between readers and texts.

Within both the narratological and stylistics traditions, it has been pointed out that the presentation of the workings of minds that are perceived as unusual can lead to a reassessment, on the reader's part, of what it means to be "normal". Margolin for example, has suggested that the presentation of the "breakdown and failure" of cognitive mechanisms in fiction "is itself a powerful cognitive tool which may make us aware of actual cognitive mechanisms, and, more specifically, of our own mental functioning" (Margolin 278). Similarly, Leech and Short have pointed out that the language used in the *Sound and the Fury* to convey Benjy's "childlike vision", "borders on poetry in recapturing a pristine awareness of things" (Leech and Short 166). In other words, the presentation of nonstandard mental functioning, or of unusual mind styles, can have a "deautomatizing" or "schema refreshing" effect on readers (Shklovsky, Cook), who are exposed to ways of making sense of experience

that they perceive as different from their own, and hence have the opportunity to consider afresh their understanding of the world and of "normality" (see also Draaisma).

Within the tradition in the study of mind style that goes back to Fowler's work, a variety of types of linguistic patterns have been shown to be relevant to the projection of distinctive mind styles. These include patterns of choice in terms of: vocabulary (e.g. Leech and Short, Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*), grammar (e.g. Leech and Short, Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*), transitivity (e.g. Halliday "Literary Style", Fowler *Linguistic Criticism*), speech representation (e.g. Bockting), metaphor (e.g. Semino and Swindlehurst, Semino "A cognitive stylistic approach", *Metaphor in Discourse*), and conversational behaviour (Fanlo Piniés, Semino, "Mind Style 25 years on"). The potential role of patterns of deictic choices in the projection of mind style has not received systematic attention, but Bockting has pointed out how the mind styles of the Compson brothers in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* are conveyed, in part, by peculiarities in the use of deixis in their individual narratives. I will return to Boctking's work after providing a brief introduction to deixis.

Deixis

The notion of "deixis", which etymologically derives from the Greek word for "pointing", applies to linguistic expressions (e.g. "I", "this", "here", "now") that refer to entities and spatial or temporal locations from a particular subjective position, normally that of the producer of the text in the situational context in which the text is being produced. Lyons defines deixis as follows:

> By deixis is meant the location and identification of persons, objects, events, processes and activities being talked about, or referred to, in relation to the spatiotemporal context created and sustained by the act of utterance and the participation in it, typically, of a single speaker and at least one addressee. (Lyons 637)

In face-to-face interaction, which Lyons describes as the "canonical situation of utterance", deictic expressions typically take the speaker's position as their point of anchorage, and hence can only be successfully interpreted with reference to that position. This applies, for example, to the interpretation of "here" in the utterance "If you stand here you can see the top

of the church tower". In this utterance "here" refers to the specific point where the speaker is standing, and the addressee needs to be aware of this position in order fully to interpret what the speaker is saying. Deixis is often described as "egocentric" precisely because, typically, "the ego of the encoder represents the center of orientation" (Rauh 12). This point of orientation has also been referred to as the default "deictic centre", "zero point" or "origo" (see Lyons, Bühler, Levinson).

Deixis involves a (subjective) distinction between what is perceived as "proximal" to the deictic centre and what is perceived as "non-proximal" or "distal". This is clearly evident in what is arguably the most prototypical dimension of deixis, namely space deixis. Space deixis involves references to locations in terms of their perceived position in relation to the deictic centre. The main contrast, in present-day English, is that between proximal deictic expressions such as "this" and "here", which refer to locations that are perceived as close to the deictic centre, and non-proximal expressions such as "that" and "there" which refer to locations that are perceived as far from that position. The perception of proximity is subjective and context-dependent. For example, "here" typically includes the speaker's position, but can vary quite dramatically in terms of how wide an area it refers to around that position. While in the example above "here" only refers to the few square centimeters in which the speaker is standing, much larger areas are referred to as "here" in utterances such as "It doesn't rain much here" or "We drive on the left side of the road here". Space deixis also include the use of the motion verbs "come" and "go" to indicate, respectively, movement towards the deictic centre and movement away from the deictic centre.

In addition to space deixis, this essay will be concerned primarily with two further deictic dimensions, namely time and person deixis. Time deixis involves the expression of a contrast between "now" and "not-now" or "then", and includes expressions such as "now", "then", "later", "today", "yesterday", "tomorrow", "ago". Tense contrasts are also deictic, as they grammaticalize "the relationship which holds between the time of the situation that is being described and the temporal zero-point of the deictic context" (Lyons 678). The temporal deictic use of "this" and "that" in expressions such as "this month" or "that day" arguably involves a metaphorical extension to time of the spatial distinction between "here" and "not-here/there" (see also Lenz). Person deixis, on the other hand, involves references to the roles of addresser and addressee in communication, and includes, in English, the first and second-person pronouns "I", "we" and "you". In fact, the pronoun "I" is one of the most prototypical

cases of deictic expressions, as it normally refers to whoever is currently speaking or writing, so that its referent changes with every change of speaker/writer. Space, time, and person deixis are normally described as the main types of deictic phenomena (e.g. Lyons, Fillmore, Levinson). The linguistic expression of a range of further phenomena has also been described as involving deictic contrasts. These include for example, references to portions of a text or utterance from the current point in the ongoing text or talk ("discourse deixis"), references to the rank or social status of other people from the speaker's/writer's own position in a family, institution, or society ("social deixis"), and the use of expressions such as "this" and "that" to express emotional distance ("empathetic deixis") (see Lyons, Fillmore, Levinson, Rauh).

While the speaker's or writer's here-and-now constitutes the unmarked deictic centre, there are many instances and forms of communication where a different position in space and time is adopted as the zero-point for the use of deictic expressions. Consider, for example, the question "Are you coming to the cinema tonight?", which may be uttered in a telephone conversation between two people currently in their respective homes. The use of "come", in this case, indicates movement towards the location in which the speaker expects to be later that day, and towards which s/he is hoping the addressee will also travel. This phenomenon, which is known as "deictic projection" (Lyons, Levinson), is well-recognized in a variety of forms of communication, but is particularly relevant for the study of deixis in fiction, where the deictic centre typically corresponds to the position of a narrator or character within an imaginary situational context. In a classic early study of deixis, Bühler introduced the notion of "deixis at phantasma" to capture the use of deictic expressions to refer to elements of a situational context that is different from the current communicative situation, and not directly perceivable by the listener or reader. Bühler says that in such cases,

> the narrator takes the listener into the realm of the memorable absent, or fully into the realm of constructive imagination, treating him there to the same deictic words that he may see and hear what is there to be seen and heard (and to be touched or perhaps even smelled or tasted). Not with the outward eye, ear, etc. but with what, in contrast, is conventionally called the "inner" or the "mind's eye or ear in everyday language […]. (Bühler 22)

In other words, in fiction as well as in many other cases of deictic projection, the use of deictic expressions does not rely on the addressee's awareness of the speaker's position and

perspective, but rather provides clues for the construction of a subjective position within an imagined situational context in reference to which the deictic expressions used in the text make sense (see also Green, Semino "Deixis and the Dynamics"). Indeed, deixis plays a central role in accounts of the textual projection of point of view (e.g. Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, Short), as well in models of narrative comprehension that attempt to account for how readers imagine text worlds by navigating through changes of time and place (e.g. Duchan *et al*., Emmott, Fauconnier, Werth, Gavins). The mental representations of situations that we form as we read a narrative tend to be defined primarily in deictic terms, whether they are labelled "mental spaces" (Fauconnier), "sub-worlds" (Werth), or "contextual frames" (Emmott). More specifically, deictics are among the linguistic expressions that may be used to indicate shifts from one mental space, sub-world or contextual frame to another (see also Gavins's notion of "world switches").

As I mentioned earlier, Bockting has discussed deixis in relation to the textual projection of characters' minds and personalities. She argues, for example, that, in Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, the impression of Benjy's limited cognitive abilities is reinforced by the fact that he does not seem able to engage in deictic projection, or, in other words, to understand others' perspectives and points of view. In contrast, the attribution of schizophrenia to Quentin is in part based on stretches of text in which there is no stability of deictic centre, resulting in what Bockting calls a "breakdown of the deictic system" (Bockting 70). In the rest of the essay, I discuss in detail the peculiar uses of deixis in Hughes's "Wodwo" and Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, and their implications for the textual projection of the protagonists' minds.

Deixis and the poetic *persona*'s mind in Ted Hughes's "Wodwo"

Ted Hughes's poem "Wodwo" first appeared in 1967, as the last poem in the collection of the same title. It is reproduced in full below.

Wodwo

What am I? Nosing here, turning leaves over
Following a faint stain on the air to the river's edge
I enter water. Who am I to split
The glassy grain of water looking upward I see the bed
Of the river above me upside down very clear
What am I doing here in mid-air? Why do I find
this frog so interesting as I inspect its most secret
interior and make it my own? Do these weeds
know me and name me to each other have they
seen me before do I fit in their world? I seem
separate from the ground and not rooted but dropped
out of nothing casually I've no threads
fastening me to anything I can go anywhere
I seem to have been given the freedom
of this place what am I then? And picking
bits of bark off this rotten stump gives me
no pleasure and it's no use so why do I do it
me and doing that have coincided very queerly
But what shall I be called am I the first
have I an owner what shape am I what
shape am I am I huge if I go
to the end on this way past these trees and past these trees
till I get tired that's touching one wall of me
for the moment if I sit still how everything
stops to watch me I suppose I am the exact centre
but there's all this what is it roots
roots roots roots and here's the water
again very queer but I'll go on looking

(Hughes 183)

The title of the poem is derived from the Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green*

Knight, where wodwos are among the wild creatures of the forest that are fought by the knight during his journey through the Wirrall. Hughes himself described the first-person speaker in the poem as:

> some sort of satyr or half-man or half-animal, half all kinds of elemental little things, just a little larval being without shape or qualities who suddenly finds himself alive in this world at any time. (quoted in Sagar *The Art of Ted Hughes* 98).

Critics variously describe the wodwo as a "wood sprite" (Scigaj 128) or a "proto-human" (Holmes 131), as representing the experience of the child, or the poet's way of exploring reality (Sagar, *The Art of Ted Hughes* 97, "Fourfold vision" 297; see also Bassnett 23). In my own reading of the poem, the poetic speaker is a creature who has just made the transition to consciousness, which leads to the question that opens the poem: "What am I?". Indeed, there is, broadly speaking, consensus among the critics that the poem is concerned with identity, consciousness, knowledge, freedom, and the relationship between the self and the world. Hughes's choice of the wodwo as the poem's voice and protagonist is both sufficiently precise and sufficiently elusive to thwart any attempt to approach the poem as a riddle, but also allows readers to see the wodwo as potentially representing any conscious creature who is preoccupied with its own uncertain identity and place in the world. In what follows I suggest that the use of deixis interacts with other aspects of the poem in order to convey a sense of disorientation and lack of boundaries, and to create the impression of the workings of a mind that can be described as, in some respects, primitive, and very strongly self-focused. I begin with some general comments on what I see as the most salient aspects of the poem and then I focus on deixis in more detail.

In Tsur's terms, understanding the poem involves "delayed" (as opposed to "rapid") categorisation, as the Wodwo cannot be straightforwardly identified as a member of a pre-existing, familiar category: it seems able to fly, swim and move on land; in lines 6-8, it is not clear whether it dismembers and eats the frog, or whether it is small enough to move inside the frog's body; similarly, in lines 26-27, it is not clear whether it is on the ground or below ground when it comes across what it describes as "roots / roots roots roots". Readers may of course vary in the extent to which they accept the impossibility of establishing precisely the characteristics of the wodwo, and in whether they experience this elusiveness as a source of pleasure or frustration.

A number of linguistic characteristics of the poem are likely to contribute to an overall impression of fast and erratic movement, uncertain boundaries and disorientation. The poem is written in highly irregular free verse: there are no divisions into stanzas, no regularity in line lengths, no discernible metrical pattern, no rhyme scheme, and many instances of enjambment (e.g. "have they / seen me", in lines 9-10). Punctuation is used sparingly in the first half of the poem (primarily in the form of question marks) and disappears completely after line 15. In addition, no capital letters are used in the final nine lines of the poem except for the first-person singular pronoun "I". This makes it difficult to establish boundaries between different clauses and sentences, and contributes to a sense of rapid and increasingly anxious, almost breathless movement. Towards the end of the poem, the grammatical structure of the wodwo's monologue becomes increasingly fragmented, so that it would not be possible simply to insert punctuation and capital letters to produce a series of well-formed sentences (e.g. line 23: "till I get tired that's touching one wall of me").

Although the poem consists of only 28 lines and 262 words, it contains 11 questions. The wodwo's concern with its own identity is evident from the opening question "What am I?". The same question occurs again in line 15, and is rephrased as "Who am I" in line 3. In addition, the wodwo wonders about:

- its shape and size in lines 20-21: "what/ shape am I am I huge";
- its name in lines 8-9 and 19: "Do these weeds/ […] name me to each other", "what shall I be called";
- the reasons for its actions and reactions in lines 6-8 and 15-17: "What am I doing here in mid-air? Why do I find/ this frog so interesting", "picking/ bits of bark off this rotten stump gives me/ no pleasure and it's no use so why do I do it";
- its status as "the first" and the existence of an owner in lines 19-20: "am I the first / have I an owner".

Cumulatively, I would argue, the wodwo's questions seem to suggest a transition from lack of consciousness to consciousness, and from instinctive to intentional behaviour. This transition raises questions of identity and relationships that the wodwo cannot answer. There are several references to lack of roots and physical ties in the poem (lines 10-15, 26-27), which can be interpreted metaphorically as suggesting both freedom and a lack of a clear

sense of origin and belonging. The poem ends with the decision to "go on looking" and no full stop, suggesting that the search for an answer to the wodwo's questions has not yet been successful but is continuing.

Deixis in the poem

In this section I show how the poem has an unusually high frequency of deictic expressions, and that these expressions overwhelmingly express "proximal" as opposed to "distal" relationships in terms of person, space and time deixis. This, I suggest, contributes to the impression of a mind that seems unable to go beyond its own current subjective position in the here-and-now, and to distinguish between "here" and "there", "now" and "then", and "me" and a possible "you".

To begin with person deixis, the poem contains 35 occurrences of the first-person singular pronouns "I" and "me" out of 262 words (26 instances of "I" and 9 instances of "me"). This corresponds to 13 per cent of the words in the poem. An automatic comparison between the poem and two larger corpora of fiction confirms that this is an unusually high frequency of first-person singular pronouns. I used the keyword tool within the online corpus-comparison software Wmatrix (http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/wmatrix/) to compare word frequencies in the poem with those in the "Imaginative Writing" section of the British National Corpus Sampler (hereafter BNC Sampler) , which contains approximately 233,000 words. The output of the tool is a list of words in the text under analysis, starting with those that are "overused" to the highest level of statistical significance as opposed to the larger reference corpus. In corpus linguistics, the words that are overused to a statistically significant extent in a particular set of data as compared with a relevant larger corpus are known as "key words". An appropriate level of statistical significance for this kind of comparison is 99 per cent, which corresponds to $p < 0.01$ and a log-likelihood value[1] of 6.63 or above. The top four key words in the poem are: "am", "I", "roots", "me". In each case the result is statistically significant at 99.99 per cent ($p < 0.0001$). The same four words were also found to be the most overused lexical items at the same level of statistical significance in a second comparison of the poem with a smaller 40,000-word corpus of first-person fiction, which was originally compiled as part of a project

[1] The log-likelihood ratio is a widely used method for calculating statistical significance in corpus linguistics, as it does not assume normal distribution (see Dunning 1993). In the output of the Wmatrix keyword tool statistical significance is expressed in terms of log-likelihood values. In the rest of this paper I will translate the relevant values into percentages and probability values (p-values), as these have wider currency as expressions of degrees of statistical significance.

on speech, writing and thought presentation in 20th century British narratives (see Semino and Short). In contrast, the poem contains no instances of second-person pronouns: although there are many interrogative structures, the wodwo's questions appear to be instances of self-address, with no explicit references to a potential addressee.

I now consider spatial and temporal deixis in turn. The poem contains 11 instances of proximal space deixis: 3 instances of "here", 5 instances of "this", and 3 instances of "these". Together, these account for approximately 4 per cent of the words in the poem. According to my keyword analysis, all three words are overused in the poem (at a statistical significance level of 99 per cent or above) as compared with both the Imaginative Writing section of the BNC Sampler and the first-person fiction corpus. The poem contains only two potential instances of distal deixis, namely "go" in line 21 and "that" in line 23. However, the fragmented grammatical structure of line 23 makes it difficult to decide whether "that" is used as a relative pronoun or as a demonstrative pronoun. Either way, it refers to something that is in fact described as "touching" the wodwo's body. Similarly, the verb "go" in line 21, which refers to movement away from the speaker's position, is followed by "on this way", where the use of the proximal space deixis "this" indicates a focus on the wodwo's current position.

As for time deixis, the poem contains no temporal deictic adverbs, but the use of tense is worthy of note. All finite verbs in the poem are in the simple present tense (e.g. "am", "find", "suppose"), apart from one instance of the present perfect ("have coincided") and one present continuous ("that's touching"). There are, in other words, no instances of past tense verbs.

To summarize my observations so far, all instances of person and time deixis in the poem express proximal deictic relationships. Of the 13 instances of space deixis, 11 are proximal deictics; both the remaining two ("go" and "that") refer to entities and locations that are further described as being close to the speaker (and, as I mentioned earlier, the deictic status of "that" in line 23 is not clear). Five of the proximal person and space deictics ("I", "me", "here", "this" and "these") are overused to a statistically significant extent as compared with two corpora of contemporary fiction. In other words, the use of deixis in the poem suggests an exclusive focus on the self and its immediate environment, with no clear evidence of an opposition between "here" vs. "there" and "now" vs. "then", nor of any attempt to engage with other creatures as "you".

There are, however, points in the poem where it can be argued that the use of distal deixis would have been appropriate. Consider, for example, lines 1-3:

> […] Nosing here, turning leaves over
> Following a faint stain on the air to the river's edge
> I enter water. […]

I regularly ask students in my classes whether the location referred to as "here" in the first line of the extract is the same location in which the wodwo "enter(s) water" in the third line of the quotation. The answer is always "no": students tend to point out that the intervening non-finite clauses suggest movement in both space and time, so that the wodwo reaches the water at a different point from that referred to by "here". However, the use of a series of three non-finite clauses, with no temporal conjunctions, makes it possible for the poetic speaker to provide a moment-by-moment account of its movements without using distal deixis of space or time. This makes it difficult to establish boundaries between different times and locations in the series of actions described in the poem, and contributes to the potential sense of rapid, fluid and partly confused movement that may also result from the infrequent use of punctuation and by the lack of clear grammatical boundaries, especially in the second half of the poem. Compare, for example, the following two (inevitably inadequate) re-writings of the above three lines with the original version:

> After nosing there, turning leaves over
> And following a faint stain on the air to the river's edge
> I enter water.

> I nosed there, turned leaves over,
> Followed a faint stain on the air to the river's edge
> And now I enter water.

Both alternative versions of Hughes's original lines refer to the same sequence of actions, but the temporal and spatial separation between them is made explicit by the use of distal deixis of space ("there") and time ("nosed", "turned", "followed"). This results in the establishment of a distinction between here-and-now and there-and-then. In contrast, in Hughes's poem the

sequence of the wodwo's actions is presented as a series of here-and-now's, some of which seem to be extremely brief, as in the lines 21-22:

> […] if I go
> to the end on this way past these trees and past these trees

According to my students' responses to these lines (as well as my own), the two instances of "these trees" in the quotation above refer to *different* groups of trees. When invited to rephrase the second line of the above quotation in a way that they perceive as less unusual, my students tend to suggest "past those trees and past these trees". This alternative version suggests that the wodwo perceives one group of trees as close to its own position and the other as not close to its own position. In the original version, however, the wodwo describes each set of trees from a position from which they are perceived as close. This is likely to be interpreted as due to the speed at which the wodwo travels, so that by the time it utters (or thinks) the second occurrence of "these trees" it has moved from one location to another, and from being close to one group of trees to another. In other words, this extract from the poem is consistent with the previous one in terms of the presentation of the wodwo's experience of the world as a rapid series of here-and-now's, with no time, and possibly no ability, to reflect on moments in time and locations in space that are perceived as "not here" and "not now": the words of the wodwo's monologue appear to be entirely simultaneous with its immediate actions, movements and reflections.

Overall, my proposal is that the distinctive use of deixis in the poem contributes to the projection of a mind that can be described as highly "egocentric" in the sense that it is focused on the self in the here-and-now, and does not seem to possess the ability to distinguish between what is proximal as opposed to distal in space and time, nor to perceive the other as a potential addressee. This is particularly consistent with those readings of the poem where the wodwo is a "proto-human" or a partly child-like creature, and with my own interpretation of the wodwo as having just acquired consciousness: the ability to conceive of places and times other than one's location in the present, and of others as possessing separate minds and perspectives with which to engage, are complex and sophisticated human characteristics that are acquired gradually in the course of individual development. Interestingly, in line 25 the wodwo draws the following conclusion from its impression that when it sits still "everything turns to watch" it:

> […] I suppose I am the exact centre.

Scigaj (146) comments that as "'exact centre' of existence-for-the-self the Wodwo is the generator, the creator of its own universe, moment by moment". I have suggested that the use of deixis in the poem contributes to this impression of focus on the self and of "moment-by-moment cognition" (Scigaj 152). I will now turn to the role of deixis in the projection of a different kind of "egocentric" fictional mind in a novel.

Deixis and the first-person narrator's mind in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*

Mark Haddon's novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (hereafter *The Curious Incident*) appeared in 2003. It is part of growing trends in both "crossover fiction" (it was published in two different covers for adults and children) and in the fictional representation of characters with autistic-spectrum disorders (see Walsh, Greenwell, Draaisma). The protagonist and first-person narrator, Christopher Boone, is fifteen years old, and is normally described (including on the book's back cover) as being autistic, and specifically as being affected by Asperger's syndrome, a form of high-functioning autism. The novel has won several literary prizes (e.g. the 2003 Whitbread Book of the Year), and has been widely acclaimed for the moving and "realistic" representation of the first-person narrator. Haddon himself has repeatedly stated that he has no specialist knowledge of autistic-spectrum disorders, and that he did not intend to write a novel about autism or Asperger's syndrome. Rather he states that:

> if anything it's a novel about difference, about being an outsider, about seeing the world in a surprising and revealing way. it's as much a novel about us as it is about christopher. (spellings as in original, from the author's blog: http://www.markhaddon.com/aspergers-and-autism, accessed November 2010)

Indeed, the words "Asperger" and "autism" do not occur in the novel, but the reader is provided with different sources of evidence that lead to the inference that the narrator and protagonist has an autistic-spectrum disorder. Christopher describes himself as "someone who has Behavioural Problems" (Haddon 59), and goes to a special school, alongside

children with a range of disabilities. He does not tolerate physical contact, is unusually fond of routine, has trouble sleeping at night, finds it difficult to communicate with other people, and is exceptionally talented in Maths. Christopher is also a very self-conscious narrator, who makes many meta-narrative and meta-linguistic comments (see also Walsh). He says that he has been encouraged to write the novel by one of his school teachers, but adds that, as he only likes factual writing, he has decided to write an autobiographical account of his attempt to discover who killed his next-door neighbour's dog, Wellington. He also spells out that he finds people "confusing" for two reasons: their tendency to communicate non-verbally (e.g. via facial expressions), and their tendency to use metaphors, which Christopher dismisses as "lies". Indeed, Christopher also says that he never lies, and that he is unable to engage in small talk, or, as he puts it, "chatting".

The language Christopher uses, both as a narrator and as a character, provides the reader with additional clues on the distinctive way in which his mind works. His vocabulary arguably displays both what Fowler (*Linguistic Criticism*) calls "underlexicalization" and "overlexicalization". Christopher mostly uses a simpler and more limited range of words than one would normally expect of an adolescent of his age (for example he does not know what "single" or "return" mean as descriptions of train tickets), but displays unusual lexical sophistication when he discusses the mathematical and scientific topics he is fond of. Similarly, the grammatical structures he uses tend to be fairly simple, except for some of the stretches of text where he deals with his favourite topics. As far as communication is concerned, it becomes clear at various points that Christopher is not able to lie strategically, and there are many occasions where, both as a narrator and as a character, he does not seem able to judge what amount of information is appropriate for his addressees, and hence provides too much or too little detail (in Grice's terms, Christopher has trouble with the maxim of Quantity; see Semino "Mind Style 25 years on"). All this points in the direction of a "Theory of Mind" problem, which is associated with autistic-spectrum disorders: the inability to understand that others have mental states that are different from one's own, and to attribute mental states to others on the basis of their behaviour (e.g. Baron-Cohen). Indeed, Christopher recounts how he failed a standard 'Theory of Mind' task when he first started school (Haddon 145).

Some of the characteristics I have mentioned are evident in the passage below. Christopher's next-door neighbour, Mrs Shears, has called the police after finding Christopher in her garden

in the early hours of the morning holding her dead dog, who has a garden fork sticking out of its body. In the extract Christopher describes the arrival of the police, and his conversation with a policeman:

> Then the police arrived. I like the police. They have uniforms and numbers and you know what they are meant to be doing. There was a policewoman and a policeman. The policewoman had a little hole in her tights on her left ankle and a red scratch in the middle of the hole. The policeman had a big orange leaf stuck to the bottom of his shoe which was poking out from one side.
>
> The policewoman put her arms round Mrs Shears and led her back towards the house.
>
> I lifted my head off the grass.
>
> The policeman squatted down beside me and said, 'Would you like to tell me what's going on here, young man?'
>
> I sat up and said, 'The dog is dead.'
>
> 'I'd got that far,' he said.
>
> I said, 'I think someone killed the dog.'
>
> 'How old are you?' he asked.
>
> I replied, 'I am 15 years and 3 months and 2 days.'
>
> 'And what, precisely, were you doing in the garden?' he asked.
>
> 'I was holding the dog,' I replied.
>
> 'And why were you holding the dog?' he asked.
>
> This was a difficult question. (Haddon 7)

In the next section I show how some idiosyncrasies in Christopher's use of (especially person) deixis contribute to the representation of the distinctive ways in which his mind works.

Deixis in the novel

In this section I begin by discussing the occasional failure, on Christopher's part, to use anaphoric expressions where they would normally be expected. I then go on to consider the use of person deixis in Christopher's narrative.

Anaphora is not, strictly speaking, a deictic phenomenon. However, there is no clearcut boundary between anaphoric references to previously mentioned entities on the one hand, and discourse deictic references to portions of the ongoing utterance or text on the other (e.g. see Levinson 85). Lyons, for example, states that "anaphora rests ultimately on deixis", as the use of anaphoric expressions depends, in part, on how recently a particular referent has been mentioned, and "recency of mention is itself a deictically based notion" (Lyons 671).

There are occasions in *The Curious Incident* where Christopher uses full noun phrases where anaphoric expressions would normally have been more appropriate. Consider the extract below, which is a description of the ticket hall of a railway station:

> And there was a long desk at the other side of the big room and a window on the desk and there was a man standing in front of the window and there was a man behind the window, and I said to the man behind the window, 'I want to go to London.' (Haddon 188)

The vocabulary used by Christopher in this extract is simpler and more generic than one may expect of a fifteen-year-old: expressions such as "big room" and "man behind the window" are used to describe entities for which more specific descriptions exist, such as "station foyer" and "ticket seller". This potentially creates an effect that has been discussed both in stylistics and narratology, whereby readers may initially have difficulties recognizing a situation they are in fact familiar with (e.g. see Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism*, Margolin). The grammatical structure of the sentence quoted above is also striking in its simplicity: the sentence consists of four clauses linked by "and". This type of structure is more typical of speech than writing, and tends to be used in fiction to create the impression of child-like minds, as, for example, Benjy's in *The Sound and the Fury* (see Leech and Short 165). In addition, Christopher's description contains much unnecessary repetition, as he repeats whole noun phrases where an anaphoric expression would normally be used. For example, the third instance of "window" in the extract above could have been replaced by "it", and the second instance of "man behind the window" could have been replaced by "him", or "the latter/second man". This kind of phenomenon does not occur systematically throughout the novel, but, where it does occur, it gives Christopher's prose a rather laboured feel, and reinforces the impression of his sense of alienation and processing difficulties in environments that would normally be expected to be familiar to a fifteen-year-old.

The most systematic and idiosyncratic patterns in the use of deixis in the novel, however, concern person deixis. A keyword analysis reveals that first-person singular pronouns are overused in the novel, while first-person plural pronouns are underused. More specifically, a comparison between the novel and the Imaginative Writing section of the BNC Sampler conducted by means of the Wmatrix online tool revealed that the subject pronoun "I" is the second top key word in the novel (after "and" and "because"): it occurs over 2,000 times in the approximately 62,000 word contained in novel. This result is statistically significant at 99.99 per cent ($p < 0.0001$). Both "me" and "my" were also found to be overused in the same comparison, respectively at 99.99 per cent ($p < 0.0001$) and 99 per cent significance ($p < 0.01$).

It could be objected that the high frequency of first-person pronouns in comparison with the Imaginative Writing section of the BNC Sampler could simply be due to the fact that *The Curious Incident* is a first-person narrative. However, "I" was revealed to be the third top key word even when the novel was compared with the 40,000-word corpus of first-person 20th century fiction created as part of the project discussed in Semino and Short. Even in this case, the level of significance was 99.99 per cent ($p < 0.0001$). "My" was also found to be overused in this second comparison, at a 99 per cent level of significance ($p < 0.01$). In other words, the frequency of first-person singular pronouns in Haddon's novel is unusually high, even as compared with other examples of first-person fiction. This applies particularly clearly to the subject pronoun "I". I would argue that this reflects Christopher's tendency to be unusually focused on himself, and, more specifically, his own actions and thoughts, which may contribute to the impression that he has an autistic-spectrum disorder. In addition, his use of *plural* first-person pronouns suggests some degree of alienation from others.

The comparison between *The Curious Incident* and the Imaginative Writing section of the BNC Sampler revealed that the pronoun "we" is the 23rd most underused word: it is used unusually infrequently in the novel as compared with the reference corpus, at a level of significance of 99.99 per cent ($p < 0.0001$). The corresponding object pronoun "us" and possessive determiner "our" are also underused, at a level of significance of 99.9 per cent ($p < 0.001$). "We" and "our" were also found to be underused when the novel was compared with the first-person fiction corpus, at a level of significance of 99 per cent ($p < 0.01$). This

could be taken as an indication that Christopher's sense of commonality with others is less evident in the novel than is the case in other fictional texts.

An examination of a concordance of "we" in the novel revealed a further relevant pattern in Christopher's use of this pronoun. Christopher almost exclusively uses "we" as the subject of verbs indicating what Halliday (*Functional Grammar*) calls "material processes", namely verbs evoking physical actions, such as "we drove off", "we went for a walk". Conversely, Christopher does *not* use expressions such as "we felt", "we decided", "we thought": he does not use "we" as the subject of verbs indicating what Halliday (*Functional Grammar*) calls "mental processes", namely verbs evoking cognitive and emotional states and changes. The only exception to this pattern are cases of the "generic" use of "we" to refer to people generally, which Christopher primarily employs when discussing knowledge about scientific topics, as in "because when we look up into the sky at night there will be no darkness". In contrast, the first-person fiction corpus (which, it should be noted, is smaller in terms of word count than *The Curious Incident*) contains expressions such as: "But we still love the place for itself", "the experience we had shared", "I think we liked it that way because both of us had a feeling that the meetings should be something of a secret". In Palmer's (*Fictional Minds*) terms, these kinds of expressions are one of the textual indicators of "intermentality", the attribution of shared internal states to groups consisting of more than one person, or, in this case, of groups consisting of the speaker/narrator and at least one other person. The fact that this form of intermentality does not seem to occur in Christopher's narrative can be seen as one of the ways in which the novel suggests that Christopher has a "Theory of Mind" problem: he does not tend to talk about shared mental states with others because he does not have a fully developed ability to understand the workings of others' minds.

In this context, the few occasions in which Christopher suggests some form of intermental activity involving himself and another character are particularly foregrounded. The following example occurs just after Christopher has been collected by his father from the police station where he was taken after hitting the policeman who appears in the extract I quoted above.

> I stepped outside. Father was standing in the corridor. He held up his right hand and spread his fingers out in a fan. 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, so we do this instead, and it means that he loves me. (Haddon 21)

Here Christopher explains his own and his father's behaviour in terms of a shared understanding of each others' preferences and emotions (cf. "we do it because"). However, this behaviour is clearly not the spontaneous outcome of mutual understanding, but rather the result of an explicit agreement on how to achieve some degree of physical intimacy with Christopher in spite of his aversion to bodily contact.

A further set of comparisons by means of the keyword tool in Wmatrix was carried out in order to exclude the possibility that the quantitative results I have presented were unduly influenced by the presence of other characters' voices within Christopher's narrative. I created an electronic version of the novel which excluded all instances of direct speech presentation of utterances produced by characters other than Christopher himself. I then repeated the comparisons mentioned above. All results were confirmed as statistically significant at similar levels, with the exception of "me", which was not found to be overused in the "Christopher only" version of the novel as compared with the Imaginative Writing section of the BNC sampler. In fact, as suggested earlier, "me" was not found to be overused in the complete novel as compared with the first-person fiction corpus even in my first set of comparisons, in contrast with "I" and "my", which turn out to be overused in all the comparisons I have conducted. This suggests that Christopher tends to talk unusually frequently about what *he* does and thinks, rather than about how other people affect him.

The results obtained when comparing the "Christopher only" version with the two reference corpora revealed a further potentially relevant pattern in Christopher's use of person deixis that was not equally prominent when considering the novel as a whole. This pattern concerns the use of second-person pronouns in *The Curious Incident*. The reflexive second-person pronoun "yourself" is underused in the whole novel as compared with the Imaginative Writing section of the BNC Sampler, at a level of statistical significance of 99 per cent ($p < 0.01$), while "you" is underused in the whole novel as compared with the first-person fiction corpus at a level of statistical significance of 99.99 per cent ($p < 0.0001$). When the same comparisons were carried out with the "Christopher only" version of the novel, the underuse of second-person pronouns turned out to be more marked. The comparison with the Imaginative Writing section of the BNC sampler revealed that "you", "your" and "yourself"

are underused, at a level of statistical significance of 99.99 per cent for "you" and "your" ($p < 0.0001$), and 99 per cent for "yourself" ($p < 0.01$). "You" and "your" were also found to be underused in the "Christopher only" version of the novel as compared with the first-person fiction corpus, at a level of statistical significance of 99 per cent ($p < 0.01$). In other words, Christopher's narrative, including his direct speech, seem to contain an unusually low frequency of references to an addressee.

An examination of the concordances for "you" and "your" in the "Christopher only" version of the novel provides further insights into Christopher's distinctive use of second-person pronouns. The vast majority of Christopher's uses of "you" and "your" occur in narration rather than direct speech, and are best described as instances of the "generic" use of the second-person pronoun to refer to people in general, as I noted above in relation to some instances of "we". This is the case, for example, in "It was a clear night and you could see the Milky Way", and "in this experiment you put your head in a clamp". Only 18 instances of "you" (out of a total of 321) and one instance of "your" (out of 35) occur in direct speech reports of Christopher's utterances, and hence function as deictic references to another participant in communication (e.g. "I said, 'But you can't cook.'"). In other words, most of the utterances that Christopher attributes to himself do not include deictic references to his addressee(s) by means of second-person pronouns, as he does not tend to comment on or inquire about his interlocutors. This may further contribute to the impression that he is unusually self-focused, and that he has little awareness of others' mental states.

Overall, I would argue that, in *The Curious Incident*, the combination of overuse of singular first-person pronouns and underuse of both plural first-person pronouns and second-person pronouns contributes to create an impression of the particular kind of egocentricity that characterizes Christopher. He is a loner, and tends to be content in his own company. He also has difficulties understanding the mental states of others, and seldom feels a sense of affinity and commonality with them. This is consistent with the attribution to Christopher of a high-functioning autistic-spectrum disorder such as Asperger's syndrome.

Concluding remarks

In this essay I have suggested that idiosyncratic patterns in the use of deixis can be exploited in literature to contribute to the impression of fictional minds that work in "unorthodox" or

"nonstandard" ways. The notion of "egocentricity", which captures the fact that the default deictic centre is the speaker's or writer's current position, can be applied in its more general, non-technical sense to the effects of unusually frequent occurrences of proximal deictics in first-person fiction. In both of the texts I have discussed, the speaker/narrator can be described as strikingly self-focused, and as not fully able to appreciate the minds and perspectives of others. However, the discussion has also shown that the particular peculiarities in the use of deictic expressions in individual texts can be associated with further, more specific effects, such as the wodwo's exclusive concentration on the here-and-now, which does not apply to the narrator in *The Curious Incident*. I have also shown how the use of corpus-based methods to compare individual texts with relevant larger corpora can provide quantitative support for claims about unusual frequencies of particular linguistic features, which would otherwise lack a solid empirical foundation.

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