

**Representing Reactive Attachment Disorder in Contemporary Fiction:
Creating New Paths for Neurodiverse Characters**

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ABTRACT

The first element of this work is a novel titled *June in the Garden*, which follows a neurodiverse protagonist with a diagnosis of reactive attachment disorder. The next section of the exegesis will provide insight into her atypical profile, particularly her traits of social disinhibition, an absence of emotion, affected cognitive processing and reasoning skills, and an inability to initiate and maintain relationships with others. The second element will include two parts: (1) a critical analysis of key diagnostic terms used in the clinical field to describe disorders relating to social-emotional detachment and disengagement, specifically reactive attachment disorder (RAD); (2) discussions on the current depiction of social-emotional detachment and, more broadly, of neurodiversity in contemporary fiction. This second part will argue that the two main pathways to depict a detachment disorder, like RAD, is heterogeneous characterisation, defined by common patterns that are exhibited in the novels selected, and typography, defined by unconventional text arrangement or a presence of visuals on the printed page. Aspects of typography will include deconstruction of the standard print form to allow for creative formatting, such as increased spacing, incomplete sentences, blank pages, and bolding of words. Another aspect will include the addition of specific visuals, such as conceptual word sharks (*The Raw Shark Texts*, Steven Hall, 2007), black and white photographs (*Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Jonathan Safran Foer, 2005), and mathematical formulas and blueprints (*The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, Mark Haddon, 2003).

These two methods, heterogeneous characterisation and typography, will explain my creative process for developing a neurodiverse protagonist, showing connections between my work and the work of other fiction writers. However, primarily this research will convey a new pathway for an atypical protagonist with a disorder relatively unknown in the wider community, to recontextualise the presentation of social-emotional detachment in fiction. I also hope to highlight the gaps in RAD research, particularly at the adult level, and to show how RAD can be portrayed realistically in a contemporary novel, without being too 'gimmicky'.

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This thesis is dedicated to my two children, both of which I had during this research degree and who inspired me to keep going.

DECLARATION

This thesis — and the work to which it refers — is the result of my own efforts. Any ideas, images and text resulting from the work of others (whether published or unpublished) are fully identified as such within the work in the footnotes and bibliography. This thesis has not been submitted in whole or partially for another other academic degree or professional qualification.

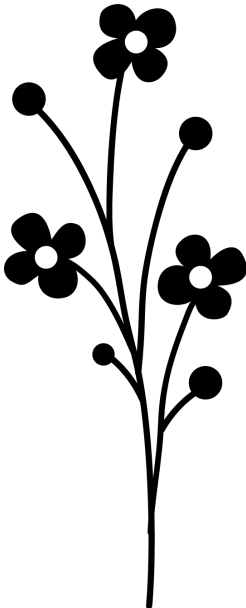
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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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June in the Garden





June and the Social Worker



<i>Gardener's Almanac</i> Mostly Sunny High of 7° SW Winds 10mph

4:12PM.

The waiting room in Maryhill Community Centre is cold, at least five degrees cooler than what we keep our house thermostat at. Mother doesn't like the cold.

I can feel the sharpness of the chill nipping at my cheeks and bare hands. It's only just turned May. It would have been better turning off the air conditioning altogether and opening a window. Certainly more cost-efficient anyway.

The backs of my thighs are already numb from the metal seat and my feet slightly tingle with pins and needles. My knuckles are healing quickly, thanks to the concoction of aloe and calendula I had ground into a fine paste using a mortar and pestle. The nurse at the local practice had offered me an anti-inflammatory gel for it, but I had refused. Why resort to lab-made medications when the landscape outside offers free and natural treatment?

I sigh and look at my watch. I had requested a milky tea at three o'clock like I always have but the receptionist reminded me that this is not a cafe and she is not a waitress. I hadn't assumed either was true, I had simply asked her for a cup of tea while I wait for my social worker, who is late again. Knowing Aileen, she'll have stopped off at a *Tesco* on the way from the office to get ingredients for her dinner then probably a *Costa* to get herself a latte of some kind. Punctuality and reliability are not her best traits. Mother soon learned to clear our entire afternoon on days of visits, never knowing when and sometimes *if* Aileen would come.

She'll not have thought to get *me* a cup of tea.

The entrance flies open, startling the old woman beside me out of her seat. Aileen stands in the doorway clutching a large brown file folder in her hand and a *Costa* takeaway cup in the other. I stand and follow her into the room behind the vaccination centre. She doesn't say anything as I trail

behind her, clutching my translucent umbrella. Her heels drag lazily on the tiled flooring and I want to ask her to pick up her feet a little more, but I don't.

She collapses into a large armchair and takes a swig from her coffee cup. She wipes the latte foam from above her top lip then sets the cup down by her feet. She gestures for me to sit too, so I edge into the chair beside her, leaving one seat between us for space. Bubble space is very important. I have a bubble and she has a bubble and they can not overlap. I only ever let my bubble overlap with Mother's.

SOCIAL WORKER: (Sighs loudly) June, I'm so sorry for your loss.

JUNE: (Pauses) Okay.

SOCIAL WORKER: I talked with the police again yesterday. The autopsy doesn't show any drugs in your mother's system—

JUNE: (Interrupts) Mother doesn't take drugs. Not anymore.

SOCIAL WORKER: However, there was a noticeable gash on the back of her head.

JUNE: Okay.

SOCIAL WORKER: (Frowns at my response) June, you've known me for years—

JUNE: Twenty-eight years, eleven months and two weeks.

SOCIAL WORKER: Yes, well, you can trust me.

Trust is a strange word. Abstract and somewhat incomprehensible. I trust my 2012 *RHS Encyclopedia of Gardening*. I trust my *Gardener's Almanac* for long range weather forecasts. I trust Mother. I do not trust short-range weather forecasts on television or on mobile phone apps, nor do I trust the 'Google' for their horticultural suggestions. Once I used the computer in the staff room at work to research organic at-home composting and was incorrectly advised to add fresh pine needles to balance out the matter in the mixture. Truth is, pine needles are far too acidic and need to be

completely dried out before usage and should only be incorporated if the matter contains solely non-acidic materials. I would never trust the internet after that.

SOCIAL WORKER: Is there anything you want to tell me?

JUNE: (Sighs) Um...

There are lots of things I want to tell her, particularly because without Mother, I have not had an opportunity to practise my social skills in real-time conversation. But I also think that she is referring to something else, something that pecks at the edges of my mind. Without Mother, my head feels like a thousand-piece puzzle that has been broken up and flipped over and turned upside down. Now nothing fits together. Maureen at work likes to do those large puzzles. She often sets one up on the back table and encourages everyone to have a turn. I'm not allowed anymore. I can't just do one piece. I have to finish it, all of it, even if it takes me the rest of the work shift. Therefore, I don't look at the back table of the staff room. I simply sit at the first table, facing the door, and eat my packed lunch until the timer beeps on my watch, then I clean up and go back downstairs to the shop floor.

SOCIAL WORKER: June? Is there anything you want to say?

JUNE: Yes. When can I collect Mother? She'll want to be home for my birthday.

SOCIAL WORKER: (Sighs and crosses legs) As you've been told, since there's no evidence of any wrongdoing the investigation has been closed and you are free to bury your mother whenever you want.

JUNE: Good.

SOCIAL WORKER: This might feel sudden but we need to discuss *arrangements*.

JUNE: Arrangements?

At first I think she is referring to funeral arrangements, which is natural to discuss after the death of someone. However, Mother has already written down how she wants the disposal of her body to be ‘arranged,’ which includes a navy dress from the autumn 2017 range at *M&S* and her favourite cobalt blue suede heels, a reading of Burns’ *To a Louse* if there is a small gathering of neighbours and/or former *Royal Mail* colleagues, and a buffet lunch that will consist of miniature prawn cocktails, triangular cheese sandwiches and salt & vinegar crisps. There are no other arrangements to be considered. Mother has been very clear.

SOCIAL WORKER: Your neighbour has kindly offered to look in on you daily, once in the morning and once in the evening, until we can find more suitable accommodation.

JUNE: I already have accommodation, but thank you.

SOCIAL WORKER: (Coughs and wriggles in seat) Accommodation was allocated to you and your mother as a family unit. However, since her passing, we might need the house for a...*larger* family.

JUNE: Where would I go?

SOCIAL WORKER: We’re still looking into options.

JUNE: What neighbour?

SOCIAL WORKER: Mrs Maclean at number 26.

JUNE: But Mother doesn’t like Mrs Maclean. She leaves her bins out for days after collection. It clutters the pavements.

SOCIAL WORKER: Have you considered how you’d like to bury her?

JUNE: Mrs Maclean?

SOCIAL WORKER: No, your mother.

JUNE: Oh, yes, Mother told me her wishes.

SOCIAL WORKER: (Hands me a leaflet from the brown folder) Well, just in case you have any questions. Here is more information.

JUNE: (Stands)

SOCIAL WORKER: June—

JUNE: (Sits)

SOCIAL WORKER: It's important you call me if you need anything.

JUNE: Okay (Stands again)

SOCIAL WORKER: (Picks up coffee cup and drinks, while checking phone)

JUNE: (Walks out)

The bus journey home is long and by the time I arrive back at my street, it is past six o'clock. I haven't even started peeling the potatoes or slicing the carrots. And who will put the chicken in the oven? That was Mother's job and it was always done on time.

A wave of heat surges through me and I strike, kicking over Mrs Maclean's glass recycling box. The small jam jars roll down the pavement, following close behind each other like little well-behaved soldiers. One drops onto the road and shatters, fragments spilling out onto the asphalt. That reminds me, we need more strawberry jam. I'll go past the shops tomorrow after work.

COMMENTARY

Introduction

This critical reflection will explore particular strands of neurodiversity and heterogeneity in the field of contemporary fiction, to give an understanding of the framework created for the characterisation of June in the creative work submitted for this research degree. It is my goal that this thesis recontextualises the presentation of RAD, and more generally of social-emotional detachment, to find a new way of reimagining and presenting neurodiverse characters in fiction.

Discourse on attachment theory and its connection to the notion of neurodiverse social behaviours will form one component of this paper to give insight to the psychology of the protagonist June in the creative work submitted, *June in the Garden*, beginning with a look at the origins of the term ‘neurodiverse’ and its associations with disorders relating to social and emotional disengagement, such as autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and reactive attachment disorder (RAD)¹. Subsequently, an in-depth analysis will explore the clinical understanding of attachment and the diagnostic term reactive attachment disorder, using key findings from discussions with Dr Helen Minnis, a leading RAD expert, from the University of Glasgow.

To examine where my creative narrative could sit in the context of existing fiction about neurodiversity and wider societal and academic debates, I will analyse current works of fiction within this genre, particularly those that utilise common practices largely associated with representing heterogeneity, including *A Man Called Ove* by Fredrik Backman (2014) and *The Rosie Project* by Graeme Simsion (2013). The novels I have selected all have protagonists that exhibit characteristics of social disengagement and/or emotional detachment.

An element of this analysis will encompass themes of family trauma, the mother-daughter relationship in literature, and the more general role of the mother in fictional texts that have a

¹ Disorders including autism and reactive attachment disorder will not be capitalised, as per The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5) and the CDC. Disorders incorporating the surnames of those who first described it will be capitalised, such as Asperger’s syndrome and Tourette syndrome.

character with suspected RAD, such as *The Seven Imperfect Rules of Elvira Carr* by Frances Maynard (2017) and *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* by Gail Honeyman (2017). In both novels, the daughters sustain physical and/or verbal abuse from the mother from infancy and have non-existent relationships with the father, which creates a narrative around the absence or abuse from a mother figure, similar to my own creative endeavours with *June in the Garden*.

The final strand of the critical exegesis will examine the use of literary techniques to convey aspects of emotional detachment and/or disorganised social engagement through the application of typography, visual design and marginalia. Novels I will be analysing here include Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003), Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), and Max Porter's *Lanny* (2019). I will examine how these novels represent the heterogeneous neurological patterns of their protagonists to depict social-emotional detachment, and highlight my own exploration into the ways in which the form of the novel can be used to augment the concerns of the narrative itself.

The genesis of the project comes from a place of experience and observation. Having graduated with a Master's degree in Scottish Literature and Creative Writing (2018), I sought a research project that combined creative writing with my Master's degree in Education (2010). In my twelve years of teaching experience, the students I have worked with exhibited a multitude of learning needs: autism, impairments to vision and/or hearing, attention-deficit disorders, and disabilities related to medical trauma, including brain injuries and birth complications. One disability that was new to my understanding of special education delivery was a term that will be discussed in more depth in this critical commentary: reactive attachment disorder.

Working with a child psychologist and the community social worker, it was my job as the education case manager to identify foster children displaying attributes of social-emotional delays associated with adverse childhood situations. It was then I learned of reactive attachment disorder

(RAD). I needed to educate myself further on the origins of it, the associated traits and the educational outcomes in order to identify, diagnose and integrate those children into appropriate school-based programmes.

However, upon delving into my own personal studies in RAD I discovered the research and public awareness of it was very limited. There were no diagnostic tools at the time to administer assessments, and my team and I were left to instead use tools more associated with the identification of emotional and behavioural disorder (E/BD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Based on a conversation with Dr Helen Minnis at the University of Glasgow and from reading her pilot study report, the diagnosis of RAD did exist in this period (2012-2016); however, it was not commonly known or used at a universal scale, and most certainly not in a small school district on the east coast of America where I was working at the time. Upon returning to the UK to continue my teaching career in the Scottish school system, I found it to be an educational term still not commonly discussed. And when I started to put together the proposal for this research project, I knew it was an area I wanted to explore further.

Having completed the synopsis and early chapters for the creative work that would later be titled *June in the Garden*, the character I wanted to create was of an adult age. Having commercially published four novels for a young adult audience, I sought a writing challenge and a path into the adult literary market. I had observed RAD at the childhood level and was somewhat familiar with the symptoms, but I did not know RAD within the scope of adulthood. I had questions that pertained to the psychology of it, the prevalence, and its presence in works of fiction. Questions that informed my initial research included: What does RAD look like in an adult? What impact does it have on an adult's socio-emotional profile? How could RAD be portrayed realistically in a contemporary fiction narrative?

Having talked with Dr Helen Minnis, a leading expert on the diagnostic term, research into adulthood RAD is less prevalent. However, it is deduced that symptoms at the adult level will mirror those associated with children with RAD, particularly stunted social-emotional development. Therefore, I formulated the following thesis questions to explore: what would an adult RAD profile look like? What would June's symptoms be and how would they continue to impact her life and her ability to develop and sustain social relationships and emotional connections with others? And finally, how would these traits I have manifested in my protagonist adversely affect her general rationale and reasoning and, more crucially, her decisions after the death of her sole caregiver?

In answering these questions, I hope my research will open up more opportunities for future studies and literary representations so that reactive and disorganised attachment is an area that is better represented and more widely recognised.

To summarise, the main findings of my research will identify the key traits of RAD and detachment, and argue that the two primary avenues for depicting such social-emotional detachment are (1) an application of typography and/or visual arrangement and (2) heterogeneous narration. Using novels that employ these two components, in addition to writings on narratology and postmodern narrative theory, I will explore how I attempted to represent elements of the diagnostic term reactive attachment disorder in *June in the Garden*.

Neurodiverse Representations: Understanding the Psychology Behind 'June in the Garden'

Disability in Literature

To understand the neurodiverse characterisation of the protagonist, it is crucial to first discuss the broader subject of the representation of disability, which according to some is, "everywhere in

literature”². For the purposes of this argument, it is useful to highlight a selection of contemporary novels featuring a character with a suspected or named disability, whether it be physical or motor like in Bridget Kemmerer’s *A Curse So Dark and Lonely* (cerebral palsy) and Eric Lindstorm’s *Not If I see You First* (visual impairment), intellectual such as Erin Lange’s *Dead Ends* (Down’s syndrome), or neurological as in Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (suspected ASD); not to mention my own creative work (RAD).

Barker and Murray argue that the now “constant presence” of disability in literature “arouses notions of “deviance” or, conversely, being “special”; provides an example that shocks, creates fear, or invites pity; or functions as the subject of spiritual or philosophical contemplation.”³ Mitchell and Snyder agree that some texts use disability as a crutch, adding that “disability pervades literary narrative, first as a stock feature of characterization and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device.”⁴ Whereas, I would like to believe that the existence of narratives featuring a character with a disability are simply an attempt to provide an accurate representation of our population profile, with 22% of people in Scotland identifying as having a disability.⁵ In fact, it would be inaccurate to portray a fictional world without diversity and disability.

However, I do agree that the representation of disability in contemporary literature needs to be clearer at times, because when “disability appears to signal the possibility of so many connections to other topics, it can easily be lost or subsumed in what are presumed to be more “important” (and nearly always nondisabled) questions”⁶. For example, in Brigid Kemmerer’s *A Curse So Dark and Lonely*, a modern reimagining of *Beauty and the Beast*, Harper’s motor

² Claire Barker and Stuart Murray, “On Reading Disability and Literature,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 1.

³ Barker and Murray, *On Reading Disability and Literature*, 1, 2.

⁴ David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), 47.

⁵ “Housing and Disabled People: Scotland Statistics,” Equality and Human Rights Commission, accessed 18 April, 2023, <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/housing-and-disabled-people-scotland-statistics>

⁶ Barker and Murray, *On Reading Disability and Literature*, 2.

impairment is anchored in her opening chapter — “cerebral palsy doesn’t mean my curiosity is broken”⁷ — but quickly diminished by the elaborate story-world she enters and the tensions within it.

Having discussed this topic with the Stirling Autism Research (STAR) team, there also appears to be a growing concern about the publication of misleading information, particularly with Mark Haddon’s widely popular *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*. Both myself and the STAR team disagreed with Haddon’s depiction of a disability, assumed to be ASD; however, for this thesis I will discuss Haddon’s use of typography later when examining narrative form. Conversations with the STAR team echoed some concerns that as ASD and other disorders gain more of a presence in contemporary fiction, people with disabilities become “subject to misrepresentation and prejudice, still patronized, feared, or relegated to the margins.”⁸ It is very often for this reason that authors avoid using diagnostic terms in their creative work, possibly for fear that their representation is incorrect or exaggerated. Moreover, G. Thomas Couser states that “disabled people come to literary production from within the same culture that marginalizes them”⁹ further questioning the lack of representation in writing, with many of the authors who produce work about disability coming from “a world designed, built, and maintained for the nondisabled.”¹⁰

It was, therefore, my goal at the beginning of the thesis to avoid this notion of misrepresentation, to not use June’s disability as a “representational trope”¹¹, but instead explore the many facets of RAD, utilising its characteristics to tell the story. My goal was to create a piece of fiction that could “also do productive cultural work in the ongoing struggle against the

⁷ Brigid Kemmerer, *A Curse So Dark and Lonely* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021), 8.

⁸ Stuart Murray, “The Ambiguities of Inclusion,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 90.

⁹ G. Thomas Couser, “Signifying Selves,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 200.

¹⁰ Couser, *Signifying Selves*, 201.

¹¹ Mitchell, Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse*, x.

marginalization and oppression of disabled people”¹², as ambitious as that was. It was through my research, and my experiences as a special needs educator, that I came to the conclusion that for this thesis, social engagement disorders such as RAD and ASD be reframed as neurodiverse thinking patterns and behaviours, rather than disabilities.

Neurodiversity and its Relationship with Autism

The next strand of this critical exegesis is an explanation of the term ‘neurodiversity,’ its association with known social disengagement disorders such as reactive attachment disorder (RAD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD) — which is sometimes misdiagnosed and difficult to differentiate from RAD due to the exhibited traits — and the theory of attachment and detachment to better understand the psychology behind the creative work submitted. References will be made to prominent research and to my creative narrative to provide an understanding of the frameworks utilised to build said narrative.

The term ‘neurodiversity’ is the main focus of Steve Silberman’s *NeuroTribes* (2015) which examines the heterogeneity of certain individuals and case studies, including Henry Cavendish, “paying tribute to the ways they bring the strengths of their atypical minds to their work”¹³ in a largely homogeneous world. As indicated in *NeuroTribes*, it can refer to any individual considered to have an atypical mind¹⁴. However, when researching social-emotional impairments, one will find an abundance of information on the more commonly known diagnostic term for social disengagement: autism.

Autism originates from ‘autos,’ the Greek word for ‘self,’ labelled by renowned child psychiatrist Leo Kanner because those who presented with the disorder “seemed happiest in

¹² Ria Cheyne, “Disability in Genre Fiction,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 186.

¹³ Steve Silberman, *NeuroTribes* (London: Allen & Unwin, 2017), 7.

¹⁴ Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 7

isolation”¹⁵. In 1944, Hans Asperger studied a group of young children displaying the same developmental delays as Kanner’s patients, but also showing advanced academic competencies, particularly in maths and the sciences. His work would coin the medical term Asperger’s syndrome, which is now defunct in the clinical field, arguably because of Dr Asperger’s connections to Nazism. Changes were noted in the 2013 publication of the *American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*, which is used in the UK in combination with their own handbook: The International Classification of Diseases (ICD).

Both Kanner and Asperger are credited with establishing autism as a diagnosable medical disorder, but “Kanner seemed to see it as an unmitigated disaster, where Asperger felt that it might have certain positive or compensating features”¹⁶. Their work identified several key traits of autism which are still used today as a criterion for diagnoses, such as “repetitive or automatic movements...abnormal (and often ‘paradoxical’) sensory responses, with some sensations being heightened and intolerable...a tendency to verbosity, empty chatter, cliché-ridden and formulaic speech”¹⁷. Autistic traits like the need for routine and predictability tend to begin at an early age and can be mistaken for typical and ‘endearing’ behaviours of a young child: “He touched the same chairs and tables in exactly the same places every time he crossed the room...At first, Craig and Shannon thought his little routine was cute.”¹⁸

The British National Autistic Society estimates that around 1 in 100 children are diagnosed with autism, totalling around 700,000 in the UK alone.¹⁹ In the US, 1 in 54 children are identified with autism.²⁰ The discrepancy in rates between the US and the UK “probably reflects varying

¹⁵ Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 5.

¹⁶ Oliver Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995), 245.

¹⁷ Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, 245.

¹⁸ Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 56

¹⁹ “What is Autism?” National Autistic Society, accessed 17 September, 2020, <https://www.autism.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/what-is-autism>

²⁰ Centers for Disease Control, “Screening and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder,” accessed 18 August, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/hcp-screening.html>

levels of autism awareness and of services offered.”²¹ Another factor could be policy changes and state mandates, some of which do not exist in the UK. In 2001, a nationwide mandate saw that all fifty US states issued financial support to parents with children in need of behavioural therapies, saving families up to \$50,000 a year. Autism diagnoses increased by 10% that year and up to 18% in the following years²². This could suggest that more families were referring their child for diagnostic testing, even if they were once borderline cases. Furthermore, in 2006 “the American Academy of Pediatrics recommended screening all children for autism during routine pediatrician visits at 18 and 24 months of age”²³ which led to a greater number of diagnoses.

Another factor could be the CDC’s acknowledgement of school-administered assessments and special education classifications, an area I was familiar with when working in an autism unit at a school district in New England. Schools no longer require a medically-sourced diagnosis of autism to provide special education services to a student. In fact, nowadays a “Developmental screening can be done by a number of professionals in health care, community, and school settings” and moreover, “Training requirements are not extensive for most screening tools. Many can be administered by paraprofessionals.”²⁴ This had significant impact on schools, with many paraprofessionals — teaching assistants — now being allowed to administer assessments which would classify a student as autistic for their remaining academic years. Eventually the CDC included “those with an autism billing code or a special education classification of autism” in their data collections “to be counted as a datapoint in the “autism epidemic”” possibly inflating the rates

²¹ Jessica Wright, “The Real Reasons Autism Rates Are Up in the U.S.,” accessed 22 June, 2022, <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-real-reasons-autism-rates-are-up-in-the-u-s/>

²² Rachel Burr Gerrard, “There’s no autism epidemic. But there is an autism diagnosis epidemic,” accessed 23 June, 2022, <https://www.statnews.com/2022/02/10/theres-no-autism-epidemic-but-there-is-an-autism-diagnosis-epidemic/>

²³ Wright, “The Real Reasons Autism Rates Are Up in the U.S.”

²⁴ CDC, “Screening and Diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder.”

even more.²⁵ Of course this term ‘epidemic’ is disputable, as is the question of whether an inflation of rates took place.

As autism became more prevalent, so did the study and representation of it in texts. Within the wider scope of neurodiversity, the texts I will be discussing, including works by Steve Silberman, Oliver Sacks and Temple Grandin, allude to or reference autism, and are worth mentioning because there is an elision between the terms autism and neurodiversity with, at times, autism being ‘substituted’ for neurodiversity. To understand the psychology behind June’s atypical social behaviours, I am situating RAD in the context of ASD to highlight that the separation between the two disorders can sometimes be obscured due to the physical traits present, particularly deficits in social language and detached emotional responses. The connection between RAD and ASD is also demonstrated with Henry, whose neurodiverse social behaviours can sometimes echo June’s.

Because it is instructive for the wider idea of neurodiversity and detachment, the first text I studied was by Temple Grandin, renowned animal expert and autism advocate, who narrates her understanding of autism in *Thinking in Pictures*, particularly recalling her early school days: “I would tune out, shut off my ears, and daydream. My daydreams were like Technicolor movies in my head. I would also become completely absorbed in spinning a penny or studying the wood-grain pattern on my desktop. During these times the rest of the world disappeared.”²⁶ I applied this notion of shutting out the world with my own character June to further the theme of detachment and disengagement, having her become as absorbed in horticulture as Grandin was in spinning a penny or fixating on a particular pattern.

British neurologist Dr Oliver Sacks studied Grandin, providing the foreword for her book *Thinking in Pictures*, observing “her total bewilderment about other people’s mind, her inability to

²⁵ Gerrard, “There’s no autism epidemic. But there is an autism diagnosis epidemic.”

²⁶ Temple Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures* (New York: Doubleday Dell Publishing, 1995), 96

decipher their expressions and intentions, along with her determination to study them...as if (in her own words) she were ‘an anthropologist on Mars.’”²⁷

The term ‘Anthropologist on Mars’ became the title for his own publication later that year, in which he examined the neurodiverse qualities among a small case study of people exhibiting ASD, amnesia, colour blindness, and Tourette syndrome, with a particular focus on their interactions with the world and their relationships with others around them.

Laura James recalls her experiences with establishing emotional relationships in *Odd Girl Out: An Autistic Woman in a Neurotypical World*, singling out her concrete thinking patterns and inability to decipher contextual clues as factors that impact her career, her relationships with others, and her understanding of her self: “I find it painful when I cannot second-guess how someone else is feeling or what they are thinking”²⁸ because “I can’t name my feelings. I don’t recognize them. Don’t know what they look like.”²⁹

When contemplating her own experiences with autism, particularly with navigating social situations that rely heavily on conversational nuances or figurative language, Fern Brady poses the simple question of: “Why did everyone go around speaking in code then getting angry at me because I didn’t have the glossary for their secret language?”³⁰

My character June is also unable to process non-verbal cues and figures of speech due to her social-emotional impairment:

I don’t like ‘figure of speeches.’ I find them very confusing, especially metaphors.

IT’S RAINING CATS AND DOGS

²⁷ Grandin, *Thinking in Pictures*, 13.

²⁸ Laura James, *Odd Girl Out: An Autistic Woman in a Neurotypical World* (Colorado: Bluebird, 2018), 99.

²⁹ James, *Odd Girl Out*, 2.

³⁰ Fern Brady, *Strong Female Character* (London: Hachette, 2023), 76.

SHE'S AS HAPPY AS A CLAM

I'LL BE AS GOOD AS GOLD

HE'S A NIGHT OWL

THAT TEST WAS A PIECE OF CAKE

Why can't people just say exactly what they mean? Why bundle the meaning into a metaphor or a simile making it hard for some people to decipher what they mean?

That just seems like more work to me.³¹

Other traits that I selected for my characterisation of June based on secondary readings, my experiences as an autism educator, and informal discussions with Dr Helen Minnis and the Stirling Autism Research Team led by Dr Eilidh Cage, included: uncontrollable rage prompted by a trigger, a need for predictability and routine, particular eating habits, and a fascination with a certain subject matter or object.³² For Daniel Tammet in the memoir titled *Born on a Blue Day*, it is an “obsessive collecting of different things, such as the shiny brown chestnuts”,³³ in the case study of ‘Leo’ in Silberman’s book it is green straws³⁴ and for my character of June in the creative work submitted, it is horticulture.

Creating a chapter where June does not display empathy for her brother by taking the last of the cheese³⁵ echoes Laura James’ comment, “The unusual way I experience empathy leaves me confused about human relationships.”³⁶ Similarly, June does not process empathy like most people, and even when faced with a very obvious cue that her actions have upset her brother, she still does

³¹ Natalia Liebnitz, *June in the Garden* (Stirling University, 2023), 78.

³² Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 56-57.

³³ Daniel Tammet, *Born on a Blue Day* (New York: Free Press, 2006): 60.

³⁴ Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 48.

³⁵ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 284–289.

³⁶ James, *Odd Girl Out*, 99.

not comprehend the situation in the moment. In fact, she carries on making her sandwich, confused about his response. It is only after she's had more time to reflect that she's able to come to the conclusion that she has done something to upset him and that she will mimic an act of apology from her book, *Peter Pan*, to rectify things.

Empathy allows the “sharing of experiences, needs, and desires between individuals,” thus “providing an emotional bridge that promotes prosocial behavior.”³⁷ This is an area that June requires additional processing time with, because of her attachment delays. It is not that she completely lacks empathy, but that she is incapable of responding to it at the time. A display of empathy is “achieved through a mechanism of neural action representation that often modulates observers’ own emotional content and motivates empathic responses.”³⁸ However, if differences exist in someone’s hardwiring, like June’s, then “Differences in these neural processes may account for different individual capacities for empathy.”³⁹

Neurodiversity and its Relationship with Reactive Attachment Disorder

One such developmental delay of the social-emotional processing system that impacts the ability to show empathy and establish emotional connection with others, is reactive attachment disorder (RAD), which is sometimes misinterpreted as ASD due to the neurodiverse social-emotional behaviours exhibited.

Largely stemming from unresolved trauma from an absent, neglectful or abusive parent, there exists many variations of the term, including disorganisation disorder, detachment disorder,

³⁷ Helen Riess, “The Science of Empathy,” *Journal of Patient Experience*, no. 4 (2017): 74.

³⁸ Riess, “The Science of Empathy,” 75.

³⁹ Riess, “The Science of Empathy,” 75.

disorganised attachment, dissociative disorder, insecure attachment disorder, and DSED which is disinhibited social engagement disorder.⁴⁰

Attachment is “a term used to describe the dependency relationship children develop towards their primary caregivers.”⁴¹ Some research into attachment theory tends to focus on the mother-baby relationship; however, “an attachment figure is defined as someone who provides physical and emotional care, has continuity and consistency in the child’s life, and an emotional investment in the child’s life.”⁴² For the character of June, this attachment figure is her mother, who despite her earlier abandonment and her later mental health struggles, provides this basic emotional and physical care.

“Human infants are not born with attachments already made to their primary caregivers. This special relationship emerges over time and through a series of stages.”⁴³ These important stages were missed for June and her mother, causing her to develop *insecure* attachment patterns, resulting in a significantly altered perception of, and interaction with, the wider social world as she got older.

Early attachment behaviours include, “smiling,” “signalling or calling to,” “protesting separation,” and “seeking to be picked up.”⁴⁴ These were all behaviours June exhibited as an infant, but had no parent that responded. She could not protest separation because the separation from a parent was forced upon her when her father abandoned her in utero and her mother left her shortly after birth. She had no one to apply and practise these early attachment behaviours with. And over time, whatever attachment patterns eventually form in an individual with a background like June,

⁴⁰ Kate Moran et al, “A Study of Attachment Disorders in Young Offenders Attending Specialist Services,” *The International Journal of Child Abuse & Neglect*, (April 2017): 2.

⁴¹ Colby Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder* (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2017), 15.

⁴² Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder*, 15.

⁴³ Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder*, 19.

⁴⁴ Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder*, 21.

these patterns appear visibly “disorganized”,⁴⁵ with the person showing significant “difficulties in developing intimate relationships.”⁴⁶

June exhibits these disorganised attachment patterns through conversational exchanges with those she meets, robotic questions and responses that may come across as rude or abrupt, and sometimes by repeating social skills she’s learned from her mother or the social worker:

“Hello,” he calls to me, rather enthusiastically like I am the first and only customer to have entered his shop.

“Hello,” I say back, because that is the polite thing to do and I’ve passed enough tests with the social worker to know that.⁴⁷

Core symptoms of June’s diagnosis, reactive attachment disorder, are “Unusual social behaviours such as disinhibited/overfriendly or, conversely, withdrawn hyper vigilant behaviours.”⁴⁸ Other symptoms I observed as an educator in the US working with children diagnosed with RAD included some rigidity in behaviours similar to OCD, delayed communication skills, kleptomania, food hoarding and poor self-regulation of emotions which produced extreme episodes of rage.

These symptoms can be indicators of other developmental delays and mental health disorders; however, “classification systems recommend that RAD should only be diagnosed if there is a history of adverse early childhood experiences.”⁴⁹ In June’s case, this would be the absence of her mother. “In childhood RAD, it appears that some children who...have been maltreated fail to

⁴⁵ Helen Minnis et al, “Reactive Attachment Disorder Symptoms in Adults with Intellectual Disabilities,” *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, no. 23 (2010): 98.

⁴⁶ Minnis et al, “Reactive Attachment Disorder Symptoms in Adults with Intellectual Disabilities,” 401.

⁴⁷ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 280.

⁴⁸ Minnis et al, “Reactive Attachment Disorder Symptoms in Adults with Intellectual Disabilities,” 398.

⁴⁹ American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

achieve a key developmental milestone, for example, the development of stranger anxiety.”⁵⁰ This explains why June is immediately trusting of the stranger in the London tube station who takes her money, and why she is confused by his actions rather than fearful. Her behaviours with this stranger and, later in the narrative, with ‘Aldi Boy’ could be defined as disorganised and disoriented, displaying “bizarre and contradictory behaviours” with a stranger who is not a known attachment figure.⁵¹

Diagnosis and Misdiagnosis

Unlike autism, the number of people diagnosed with RAD is largely unknown, with the first case study of RAD in school-age children having only been carried out in the last decade by Dr Helen Minnis, Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Glasgow. This study found that of the children assessed from 29 primary schools in the area of Glasgow, 1.4% displayed signs of an attachment disorder.⁵²

Diagnosing RAD is significantly more challenging than diagnosing autism because “prevalence is unknown beyond infancy.”⁵³ And because “RAD should only be diagnosed in the presence of a history of ‘pathogenic care’”, which is simply an absence of care.⁵⁴ Therefore, a suspected diagnosis can be very difficult to ascertain as it depends heavily on parents being open about their home circumstances, which may include neglect or maltreatment, but is not always the case. “Caregiving need not be abusive or purposefully negligent to result in insecure attachment.” It can unfortunately result from “the inadvertent intrusions of the parents’ own difficult

⁵⁰ Minnis et al, “Reactive Attachment Disorder Symptoms in Adults with Intellectual Disabilities,” 401.

⁵¹ Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder*, 24.

⁵² Helen Minnis, “Children on the Edge.” *The Herald*,” June 2012, accessed 3 September 2021, <https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13060537.children-edge/>

⁵³ Helen Minnis et al, “Prevalence of Reactive Attachment Disorder in a Deprived Population,” *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 202 (May 2013): 342.

⁵⁴ Minnis et al, “Prevalence of Reactive Attachment Disorder in a Deprived Population,” 344.

experiences.”⁵⁵ I took this direction with the character of June’s mother, who although provides a loving home for her daughter, is ultimately unable to care for June whilst dealing with her own mental health issues.

Dr Helen Minnis suggests that a lack of representation of RAD in both the clinical field and in contemporary fiction could be in part due to the nature of the condition with “the core symptoms of failure to seek or accept comfort are difficult to spot, because they are an absence of something rather than a presence of something.”⁵⁶ Without a full background disclosure and understanding of family history, RAD can easily be missed or, sometimes, misdiagnosed as ASD.

In one particular example, Silberman associates “socially inept genius” Henry Cavendish’s preference for routines, “anti-social behavior” and resistance to change with autism;⁵⁷ however, my interpretation of his profile leads me to question whether RAD might be present. Certainly Cavendish displayed all the usual “inexplicable idiosyncrasies”⁵⁸ of a person with ASD — “adherence to rigid timetables” and a “habit of listening obliquely to conversations rather than talking face-to-face”⁵⁹ — but he also grew up with an absent primary caregiver and “may have been traumatized as a child by the death of his mother.”⁶⁰

According to Dr Minnis, a person with RAD is at a significantly higher risk of also developing ASD and ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder); therefore separating traits of RAD from traits of ASD can be difficult.⁶¹ This has made the “diagnostic process more complex”,

⁵⁵ Rebecca McKenzie, Rudi Dallos, “Autism and Attachment Difficulties: Overlap of Symptoms, Implications and Innovative Solutions,” *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry* (May 2017): 2.

⁵⁶ Helen Minnis, personal email communications, February 2022.

⁵⁷ Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 27.

⁵⁸ Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 38.

⁵⁹ Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 32.

⁶⁰ Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 33.

⁶¹ Minnis, personal email communications.

“increasing the risk of misdiagnosis.”⁶² As “the resulting symptoms are similar” thus “leading to a lack of clarity surrounding the comorbidity of the two conditions”⁶³ I created a fictional character who displays the neurodiverse qualities of RAD and paired her with a sibling who presents with ASD to (1) highlight the gaps in clinical studies surrounding the rare condition of RAD, and (2) to further the notion that often RAD can become ‘muddied’ with other disorders pertaining to social-emotional engagement, particularly ASD, obfuscating its socio-economic origins. I also wanted to highlight that as a special needs educator, the strategies I learned for communicating with students with RAD and ASD were near identical: scripted interactions, a processing of emotions with visual charts, predictable routines, and minimal physical touch.

Socio-Economic Factors

As Minnis discusses the prevalence of RAD in a particular socio-economic population, the context for the creative work titled *June in the Garden* stems from Dr Minnis’ pilot study in 2013 which determined that children belonging to ‘high risk populations’ in urban settings are significantly more likely to suffer from episodes of maltreatment, including neglect, abuse and parental absence; and therefore, RAD was more prevalent than initially considered amongst school-age children living in deprived urban areas. In addition, it was found that providing support and services for children living in high risk communities was an ongoing challenge, based on the difficulties Dr Minnis and her team faced trying to organise meetings with parents and caregivers, and gather information for the assessments and questionnaires.⁶⁴

Therefore, it was important to this research degree and particularly to June’s narrative direction, that she be from a high-risk area of Glasgow which was defined as a geographical

⁶²McKenzie and Dallos, “Autism and Attachment Difficulties: Overlap of Symptoms, Implications and Innovative Solutions,” 1.

⁶³ McKenzie and Dallos, “Autism and Attachment Difficulties: Overlap of Symptoms, Implications and Innovative Solutions,” 2.

⁶⁴ Minnis et al, “Prevalence of Reactive Attachment Disorder in a Deprived Population,” 346.

location where the employment deprivation and child poverty rates were high, in addition to a large number of single parent households.⁶⁵ To further my characterisation of June’s mother, I also selected an area where alcohol consumption was higher than the national average, as were suicide rates and patients prescribed medication for anxiety and depression.⁶⁶

To further highlight the background choices I made when creating June, I decided to characterise her brother Henry in a different manner. For his profile, I placed him in a low risk population, defined by belonging to an area where life expectancy was considerably higher than the London average, as were property ownerships, compared to ‘social rentals’. Overall, “The Notting Hill area generally has very low levels of deprivation for income, health, employment and education.”⁶⁷ For the same reason, I also decided to assign the characters of the father and stepmother with high-income professions and postgraduate degrees.

Other than a high prevalence of RAD in low-income areas, Dr Minnis’ research has found there are two subtypes of RAD: (1) Inhibited and (2) Disinhibited. When developing June’s character, I determined that she would primarily exhibit Inhibited RAD, with established traits of poor eye contact, hypervigilance and unpredictable social responses, but with some additional characteristics associated with Disinhibited RAD, including displaying attention-seeking behaviours and being overtly forward with strangers, such as asking them personal questions and not adhering to social boundaries.⁶⁸ I wanted June to display traits of *both* subtypes because “Although two distinct subtypes are outlined, research shows that they can occur together.”⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Glasgow City Council, “Area Partnership Profile,” accessed May 2022, <https://www.glasgow.gov.uk/councillorsandcommittees/viewSelectedDocument>, 3-6.

⁶⁶ Glasgow City Council, “Area Partnership Profile,” 22.

⁶⁷ Notting Hill Gate Council, “Demographic and Public Health Area Profile,” accessed May 2022, <https://www.rbkc.gov.uk/pdf/Notting%20Hill%20Gate>, 5.

⁶⁸ Minnis et al, “Prevalence of Reactive Attachment Disorder in a Deprived Population,” 4.

⁶⁹ Moran et al, “A Study of Attachment Disorders in Young Offenders Attending Specialist Services,” 2.

For both subtypes of RAD, ultimately “behaviors are thought to arise from persistent caregiver neglect, physical or emotional abuse or a lack of continuity in caregivers that prevents the formation of stable attachments, for example frequent changes in foster care.”⁷⁰ Therefore, I sought to highlight June’s experiences of *insecure* attachments by peppering in details about her father’s abandonment pre-infancy and her mother’s neglect and absence between birth and five years old. I added snippets of past conversations with her mother to establish neglect:

When I’d asked her where she’d gone when she’d left me in a brown wicker basket outside Glasgow Royal Infirmary on the morning of August 8th 1995, when temperatures were 12° with South-East winds of 6 miles per hour (I’d looked this up on the Google), Mother had turned her back on me.⁷¹

To emphasise the duration of this neglect and imply that June’s early childhood years had been spent in foster care, not knowing where her mother was and if she’d ever be back, I wrote a chapter about her reunion with her mother and addressed it more explicitly in a later chapter:

When I was six, my social worker made me write a pretend one to Mother when she was away “finding herself.” In it I was asked to write as if she would receive it, which I’d later learn was impossible as we didn’t know where she lived.⁷²

⁷⁰ Moran et al, “A Study of Attachment Disorders in Young Offenders Attending Specialist Services,” 1.

⁷¹ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 48.

⁷² Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 225.

To suggest her foster care situation did not fully meet her emotional needs, nor accommodate for her social differences, the chapter endeavoured to shed more light on the home dynamics:

With Aileen’s help, I titled it ‘Dear Mother’ and went on to introduce myself and tell her my age, height, weight, and current interests which included sitting on the grass in the garden, braiding my hair, folding socks and looking at analogue clocks. There wasn’t much to do in foster homes other than that. There were never enough toys and when you did get your hands on one, it would only be swiftly taken by a child of larger size.⁷³

Further developments to June’s characterisation centred around strong depictions of (1) an “insecure-avoidant”⁷⁴ attachment to people, where at times in the narrative she’d appear “relatively detached and self-reliant; even self-absorbed” with a tendency to “avoid or ignore others and rarely initiate affectionate gestures”;⁷⁵ (2) an “insecure-ambivalent” attachment where June would display moments of anger and distress;⁷⁶ and (3) “disorganised/disoriented” social behaviours, “alternating engaging with and disengaging from”⁷⁷ others, evident in shortened encounters with her father, Aldi Boy and her half-brother throughout the narrative. These encounters were intentionally brief as June lacks the social capacities for longer interactions, which require more social-emotional effort.

⁷³ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 225-226.

⁷⁴ Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder*, 23.

⁷⁵ Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder*, 23.

⁷⁶ Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder*, 24.

⁷⁷ Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder*, 25.

The Relationship with Rules and Identity

Essie Johnston, a mother who adopted a child with RAD, believes these ‘disorganised/disoriented’ behaviours stem from a “need to create predictable situations.”⁷⁸ Those with RAD like their life “scheduled to be exactly the same as yesterday.”⁷⁹ This need for predictability I wove throughout my creative work:

Routine

Routine

Routine

Routine is so important according to Mother and my social worker, who rarely agreed on anything except that. But it’s not 7:45AM, and this is not my usual clock or the mattress I sleep on or my bedroom. This is not my house, and when I go inside to make my coffee it won’t be *my* kitchen. This is all different and my routine is getting lost.⁸⁰

The desire for routine is so profound that any inconsistencies or changes can be “one of the most common triggers for a child with RAD”,⁸¹ which is why June’s behaviours spiral when her mother dies, causing her to desperately seek another connection to a caregiver, because she associates routine and predictability with the role of a parent. With the mother figure gone, the next logical person in mind would be the father figure. Her need for control is the driving force for her moving into the garden shed.

Stemming from this need for control, a person with RAD often has a complicated relationship with rules, feeling an incessant need to abide by them, yet also engaging in forms of lying and/or stealing. Whilst some individuals with RAD may have a strong “motivation to lie”,⁸²

⁷⁸ Essie Johnston, *Parenting Pandora: Understanding Your Child with Reactive Attachment Disorder* (Seattle: Amazon Edition, 2014), 7.

⁷⁹ Johnston, *Parenting Pandora: Understanding Your Child with Reactive Attachment Disorder*, 19.

⁸⁰ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 157.

⁸¹ Johnston, *Parenting Pandora: Understanding Your Child with Reactive Attachment Disorder*, 20.

⁸² Johnston, *Parenting Pandora: Understanding Your Child with Reactive Attachment Disorder*, 29.

others may not understand the concept of “white lies”, the distinction perhaps being too abstract for a “concrete little brain.”⁸³ Wanting to explore this further, I wrote a chapter titled *June and the Little White Lie* where the concept is introduced to her by her younger half-brother, who explains that white lies “are ok to tell if it makes the other person happy”,⁸⁴ which is confusing to June due to her concrete thinking patterns.

A person with RAD perceives rules and relationships in a different way to those around them. They struggle “to establish relationships,” and show behaviours that are “socially inappropriate,” not adhering to common social rules, because they have experienced “maternal separation of over six months in their first two years.”⁸⁵ The stress of this maternal separation is determined to have “an adverse effect on development in terms of emotions, behaviour, social relationships and intellect.”⁸⁶

Emotions are a particularly confusing terrain to navigate for individuals with RAD, and other social disengagement disorders such as autism, with many needing clear and explicit lessons on feelings, with concrete illustrations. One example of this, that I have observed in school-based settings, is drawing emotions such as a happy face, a sad face, and so on. I incorporated this technique in the creative work, where June is explicitly taught feelings and asked to identify her own using similar illustrations:

It was Mother who made me write down on paper why I was angry and what would help me next time so that I didn’t become angry again. And then she started with the faces — a smiley face, a sad face, a hungry face, a tired face, a confused face — and

⁸³ Johnston, *Parenting Pandora: Understanding Your Child with Reactive Attachment Disorder*, 31.

⁸⁴ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 224.

⁸⁵ Moran et al, “A Study of Attachment Disorders in Young Offenders Attending Specialist Services,” 2.

⁸⁶ Moran et al, “A Study of Attachment Disorders in Young Offenders Attending Specialist Services,” 2.

she'd ask me to circle the one that best represented how I felt inside. That was easier and so we carried on with that.⁸⁷

A lack of knowledge and awareness about emotions contribute to a larger loss of identity and sense of self, a common trait among those with RAD and one that I wanted to emphasise in my characterisation of a young woman displaying signs of detachment and social disengagement. “When a mother-infant dyad is predominately anxious-ambivalent...then he is likely to develop particular patterns of relating to other people and to himself”⁸⁸ as “attachment and attachment relationships will contribute to their concept of self.”⁸⁹ Without these attachment relationships, the child will not develop a coherent concept of self and therefore, display signs of identity loss. I attempted to make this evident in June with fragments of the past spilling into her reality with snippets of flashbacks of her mother’s suicide, to try and convey a sense of her being ‘lost’ — stuck in limbo between the past, which she cannot process, and the present, which becomes increasingly unpredictable and unknown.

For adults like June, many are able to “contain their anxieties most of the time, even appearing rather dismissing in their relationships with others - until there is a crisis that shatters these defences and reveals a core of preoccupation.”⁹⁰ For June, this crisis is her witnessing the suicide of her mother.

⁸⁷ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 170.

⁸⁸ Linda Cundy, *Anxiously Attached: Understanding and Working with Preoccupied Attachment*, (London: Karnac Books, 2017), 2.

⁸⁹ Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder*, 34.

⁹⁰ Cundy, *Anxiously Attached: Understanding and Working with Preoccupied Attachment*, 3.

Security and the CARE Model

When understanding attachment disorder, it's crucial to briefly consider the prevalence of trauma and, particularly for RAD, the prevalence of *unresolved* trauma. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is “characterized by four clusters of symptoms: (1) re-experiencing symptoms (e.g., recurrent intrusive memories, traumatic nightmares, and flashbacks); (2) avoidance symptoms (e.g., avoiding trauma-related thoughts and feelings and/or objects, people, or places associated with the trauma); (3) negative changes in cognitions and mood (e.g., distorted beliefs about oneself or the world, persistent shame or guilt, emotional numbing, feelings of alienation, inability to recall key details of the trauma); and (4) alterations in arousal or reactivity symptoms (i.e. irritability, hypervigilance, reckless behavior, sleep disturbance, difficulty concentrating).”⁹¹

Although there is a link between trauma and RAD, “assumed to stem from profoundly disturbed interactions between primary caregivers or lack of a stable available caregiver at an early stage of development”, it is important to note that “studies on possible overlap between RAD or DSED symptoms and PTSD symptoms are scarce.”⁹² Moreover, some studies show that “most individuals experience a traumatic event during their lifetime” and “the majority of trauma-exposed individuals do not develop PTSD”;⁹³ in fact, “more prevalent disorders, such as depression, conduct disorder and substance misuse, occur more frequently than PTSD in young people who have experienced trauma.”⁹⁴ Therefore, the broader concept of trauma and PTSD will not be a lens through which I examine my protagonist.

What was beneficial was garnering information on the supports and strategies available to individuals with RAD to determine whether it was creatively feasible to allude to these in my

⁹¹ Cynthia L. Lancaster et al, “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Overview of Evidence-Based Assessment and Treatment,” *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 11, no. 5 (2016): 2.

⁹² Stine Lehmann et al, “Potentially traumatic events in foster youth, and association with DSM-5 trauma and stressor related symptoms,” *The International Journal of Child Abuse & Neglect*, (January 2020): 2.

⁹³ Lancaster, “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: Overview of Evidence-Based Assessment and Treatment,” 2.

⁹⁴ Helen Minnis et al, “Autism and Attachment Disorders — How Do We Tell The Difference?” *British Journal of Psychiatry Advances*, no. 28 (February 2022): 372.

narrative without the risk of adding too much of a ‘clinical feel’ to the overall piece. Although I wanted to highlight the lack of supports around families dealing with RAD, I wanted to show June’s mother’s desire to *try*. I wove in threads of a positive mother-daughter relationship, albeit challenged by the mother’s ongoing mental health problems, with accounts of evenings spent preparing meals together, watching particular television shows, camping out in the garden and engaging in conversational exchanges, allowing June to practise her social skills. Another indication of the mother’s willingness to re-attach, was routinising June’s day to create a predictable schedule. June’s wake up time was 7:30AM, lunch was noontime and dinner was exactly at 6PM because, “Ritualizing structured activities helps immensely. The child with RAD is NOT a fan of variety. Dinner is at 6:00. Not 6:01 and certainly not 5:59.”⁹⁵

Routine, expectation and predictability are key to understanding attachment patterns because they “lay the foundations of unconscious beliefs about ourselves, and expectations we hold of other people and relationships.”⁹⁶ Therefore, June’s attachment patterns, particularly her profound desire to reintroduce routine and predictability back into her life, impact her expectations of coming to London. She assumes her biological father will immediately slip into the role of a parent figure and she will once again have a primary caregiver, a home, and a routine. When this doesn't happen, June becomes cognitively disorganised, confused, and makes irrational decisions, specifically moving into the garden shed because it is simply close in physical proximity to her father. When her needs are further ignored, such as not being able to see the television screen from the garden for the opening episode of *Strictly Come Dancing*, she becomes angry and disoriented because for a person with RAD, “anger and distress seem disproportionate to the events.”⁹⁷ Regardless of the cause, rage

⁹⁵ Johnston, *Parenting Pandora: Understanding Your Child with Reactive Attachment Disorder*, 21.

⁹⁶ Cundy, *Anxiously Attached: Understanding and Working with Preoccupied Attachment*, 1.

⁹⁷ Cundy, *Anxiously Attached: Understanding and Working with Preoccupied Attachment*, 5.

is unregulated and often results in extreme displays. In June's case, she smashes the terracotta plant pots on the patio.

Furthermore, those with RAD tend to be "hypervigilant to signs of rejection" and when they are rejected, they may be persistent in their "attempts to make contact, perhaps escalating the intensity of his communication",⁹⁸ which perhaps explains why June resorts to living in the shed over the duration of the summer and why she continues her attempts at contacting her father (the letter, the meetings, etc.). She's desperately trying to form a 'secure' attachment, not realising she is naturally doing that with her brother. To her, the father is the end goal; but in reality, it is the brother that will meet her attachment needs.

Individuals with RAD also display "distancing behaviour in order to promote a sense of a predictable world and associated feelings of safety."⁹⁹ This was evident in the chapter titled *June and TV Themes Week* where the protagonist encounters Aldi Boy/Will again, and begins to socially distance herself from the conversation shortly after it begins, having just been triggered by seeing a woman standing on the edge of the riverbank who bears a strong resemblance to her mother:

I glance one more time at the woman who still stands at the water's edge, then walk slowly back to 16 Lansdowne Road, images of wild flowing hair pressing into the edges of my mind. The throbbing of bruised battered knuckles tingling across my skin.¹⁰⁰

One particular framework associated with attachment theory, and particularly RAD, is the CARE model: Consistency, Accessibility, Responsiveness, Emotional Connectedness.¹⁰¹ Due to the

⁹⁸ Cundy, *Anxiously Attached: Understanding and Working with Preoccupied Attachment*, 5.

⁹⁹ Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder*, 57.

¹⁰⁰ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 261.

¹⁰¹ Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder*, 37.

maternal separation June experienced between infancy and five years old, she developed “Disordered attachment representations” while in and out of various foster care homes “where normal attachment behaviours fail to consistently elicit CARE.”¹⁰² When reunited with her mother, this framework of CARE was re-implemented to a certain degree with most of June’s basic needs being met; however, the damage to the mother-infancy bond had already been done and patterns of reactive, disorganised, and socially disengaged attachment behaviours were already established. Moments of additional caregiver loss/absence occurred occasionally from ages five onwards, during periods where June’s mother struggled with her own mental health and alcohol addiction.

As stated on the previous page, rather than create a situation where June’s emotional needs are eventually met with the reintroduction of a parent, her biological father, I wanted another person to provide her with Consistency, Accessibility, Responsiveness, and Emotional Connectedness — her half-brother. It is through their emerging relationship, and ultimately her *attachment* to him, that she experiences some level of “attachment security and recovery from an attachment disorder.”¹⁰³ With “the provision of good CARE” from her brother and “the promotion of safe environments”,¹⁰⁴ albeit temporarily through the garden and the shed, June begins to form an identity and a stronger sense of self, understanding “who and what others represent and what relating to them is like and what interacting with the world is like.”¹⁰⁵

As with all models of supports and strategies, there exist some that are considered to be controversial or ineffective. To juxtapose the success of the CARE model with my main character, I also created a scene that implemented a strategy developed by Dutch ornithologist Nikolaas Tinbergen. He believed social disengagement disorders, particularly autism, were a result of “upsetting experiences in early childhood”, and proposed a form of intervention that “required

¹⁰² Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder*, 47.

¹⁰³ Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder*, 75.

¹⁰⁴ Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder*, 52.

¹⁰⁵ Pearce, *A Short Introduction to Attachment and Attachment Disorder*, 66.

mothers to ‘tame’ their children by hugging them for an hour each day — by force, if necessary — while gazing intently into their eyes.”¹⁰⁶ It is worth noting that Tinbergen worked predominantly with birds and not children.

Using this information, I inserted a scene in the chapter titled *June and the Return of Mother* where the character of Mother attempts to forcefully hug June to evoke an emotional bond between them, one that was severed at the stage of early infancy when Mother abandoned her. In the narrative, the ‘intervention’ does not work, much like Tinbergen’s efforts according to Silberman.¹⁰⁷

Literary Representations: Neurodiverse Attachment and Social Engagement Patterns

The second strand of this exegesis will explore twenty-first century narrative representations of emotional detachment and neurodiverse social engagement patterns, whilst reflecting upon my own creative processes for *June in the Garden*. The texts I selected for this section are: Janice Galloway’s *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003), Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), Steven Hall’s *Raw Shark Texts* (2007), Graeme Simsion’s *The Rosie Project* (2013), Fredrik Backman’s *A Man Called Ove* (2014), Ann M. Martin’s *Rain Reign* (2014), Sara Baume’s *Spill, Simmer, Falter, Wither* (2015), Gail Honeyman’s *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* (2017), Frances Maynard’s *The Seven Imperfect Rules of Elvira Carr* (2017) and Max Porter’s *Lanny* (2019).

I chose to predominantly study fiction novels from the last twenty years because I am writing a contemporary novel that will hopefully one day be published for a contemporary market; therefore, texts earlier than the year 2000 were not included. The exception to the rule is Galloway’s text, which was published in 1989. This is because the novel is so seminal and integral to my own

¹⁰⁶ Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 60.

¹⁰⁷ Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 60.

creative work in terms of its Scottish setting and general typography. More crucially, I will be examining the strong sense of social-emotional detachment that is conveyed through its narrative form, one that creates “an annex of nowhere”,¹⁰⁸ further exemplified by marginalia. The character of Joy becomes pushed out of her own story, “a voice incapable of getting itself fully into the narrative.”¹⁰⁹ I will be examining these texts of modern fiction through two literary lenses: heterogeneous characterisation and narrative form.

(1) Heterogeneous Characterisation

Characterisation is a key element of storytelling. It is simply not enough “to establish the mere existence of an individual in a storyworld”, an author must create this individual through “enduring traits and dispositions to action, in a word, personality.”¹¹⁰ Therefore, this section will examine traits and dispositions considered to be ‘heterogeneous’, which is simply atypical in nature, or ‘neurodiverse’. It is because of these traits and dispositions that I chose these fiction novels. My criteria in choosing such books developed from my research into the psychology behind *June in the Garden*, as previously discussed. The main traits I determined to be crucial for my argument were visible signs of social-emotional detachment, defined by: repetitive or formulaic speech patterns; misinterpretation of commonly known figures of speech, such as similes and metaphors; and atypical social interactions with others. Other traits included: a complex relationship with rules and routine; a heightened awareness of time and/or space; a cognitive preoccupation with a particular subject matter.

The traits examined will show common patterns across the books selected, specifically an acute awareness of time and space, place, and language, particularly “verbal idiosyncrasies and

¹⁰⁸ Janice Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (London: Penguin Random House, 1989): 37.

¹⁰⁹ Cairns Craig, “Otherworlds,” *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012): 270.

¹¹⁰ Uri Margolin, “Character,” *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 72.

catchphrases” to make the characters “memorable, even endearing.”¹¹¹ Many of these character traits are also the behaviours outlined in the first section that are commonly linked to disorders associated with social-emotional detachment, specifically diagnoses of reactive attachment disorder and/or autism spectrum disorder.

Although the selected literary works have not necessarily labelled their own protagonists as having either of these diagnoses, Frances Maynard alludes to her character as having a ‘condition’ that impacts social/emotional language processing and engagement in *The Seven Imperfect Rules of Elvira Carr* (2017) and discusses abusive aspects in the home, stemming from a mother figure, as does Gail Honeyman in her novel *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* (2017). Both of these fictional works feature protagonists with behaviours associated with RAD and were ideal for this literary exegesis. For the others, including Haddon and Backman, I have categorised them as such for purposes of this research degree based on their lead characters displaying the associated traits discussed in the section before this.

Establishing Identity

The first narrative element that I have considered as critical for depicting heterogeneity is the representation of a character’s identity, and although this is a multifaceted term I will be using the notion of identity to describe any profile that deviates “from cultural, societal, narrative, and stylistic norms” as per Fludernik’s argument.¹¹² In these novels the constructs of identity are essential to the plot, emotional tone, pace, and sometimes, the overall objective of the protagonist. As exemplified in many of the selected texts, the concept of ‘alterity’ is presented through the characters’ “performative stances” and sometimes their “memories of past experiences”,¹¹³ such as

¹¹¹ Bronwen Thomas, “Dialogue,” *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 80.

¹¹² Monika Fludernik, “Identity/Alterity,” *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 260.

¹¹³ Fludernik, “Identity/Alterity,” 261.

Ray's relationship with his father (Baume, 2015), Ove's conversations with his deceased wife (Backman, 2014), Elvira's tempestuous relations with her mother and previous incidents with 'NeuroTypicals' (Maynard, 2017), and Christopher's 'affected' memories of his mother (Haddon, 2003).

All of the novels require the presence of secondary characters, as "Identities cannot be upheld without the cooperation of others. The continuity between present and past self that subjectively exists for individuals relies to a significant extent on the support that identity construction receives from the other."¹¹⁴ Socially-atypical interactions with colleagues, neighbours, fellow students, not only serve to highlight the 'individuality' of the protagonists but also formulates their identity, or 'alterity.' For each of the mentioned characters, their identity does not "exist independently" and "becomes notable only where set into relief against one or more others" — the 'others' being either "non-human" (the setting or societal institution) or "human".¹¹⁵ This relationship between the protagonist and the 'others' who support their identity constructions is continually challenged throughout the texts, with many of the characters maintaining an innate fear of being placed in any social situation. All of the chosen protagonists desire to lead relatively isolated lives separate from the wider community, for example, "I'm still afraid of almost every single form of social situation."¹¹⁶

Interactions with others, people often depicted to be developing more typically and homogeneously than the protagonist, help uphold the identity, or lack of, and the heterogeneity of said protagonist because "identity is relational, meaning that it is not to be found inside a person but that it inheres in the relations between a person and others."¹¹⁷ In Maynard's 2017 novel, there was a common theme of 'NormalTypicals' versus 'Atypicals' — "None of us understood

¹¹⁴ Fludernik, "Identity/Alterity," 261.

¹¹⁵ Fludernik, "Identity/Alterity," 271.

¹¹⁶ Sara Baume, *Spill, Simmer, Falter, Wither* (London: Penguin, 2015): 36.

¹¹⁷ Mark Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011): 25.

NormalTypicals or how they communicated” and “NormalTypicals instinctively *knew* how to behave, but people with my Condition had to *learn*.”¹¹⁸ Elvira even researches this on her new computer, finding that “people with my Condition were in the minority: NormalTypical was the way of the world” and “it was part of my Condition to believe people were what they pretended to be. If NormalTypicals were more like us there wouldn’t be these sorts of Incidents.”¹¹⁹

This sense of self-awareness within the fictional setting is reinforced in other fictional works, where the protagonist is recognisant of their own social differences. This is shown in Baume’s novel *Spill Simmer Falter Wither* when Ray acknowledges others’ impressions of him: “Everywhere I go it’s as though I’m wearing a spacesuit which buffers me from other people.”¹²⁰ He is well-informed of his heterogeneous personality traits, as is Don in *The Rosie Project*: “there is something about me that women find unappealing. I have never found it easy to make friends, and it seems that the deficiencies that caused this problem have also affected my attempts at romantic relationships” whilst also referring to himself as “the least socially competent person in the room.”¹²¹

In Haddon’s novel the character of Christopher shows some self-awareness but does not fully comprehend the extent of his alterity when compared to others — “There were lots of people on the train, and I didn’t like that, because I don’t like lots of people I don’t know and I hate it even more if I am stuck in a room with lots of people I don’t know.”¹²² Furthermore, he avoids other people as much as possible, “I do not like talking to strangers”, because “I find people confusing”, and he is hypervigilant about his peers, often considering violence if he feels threatened, “I can hit people very hard” and “I have my Swiss army knife if they hit me and if I kill them it will be self-

¹¹⁸ Frances Maynard, *The Seven Imperfect Rules of Elvira Carr* (London: Mantle, 2017): 83, 90.

¹¹⁹ Maynard, *The Seven Imperfect Rules of Elvira Carr*: 90, 223.

¹²⁰ Baume, *Spill, Simmer, Falter, Wither*, 13.

¹²¹ Graeme Simsion, *The Rosie Project* (New York: Pocket Books, 2013): 4, 35.

¹²² Mark Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (London: Vintage, 2003): 158.

defence and I won't go to prison".¹²³ Whilst Elvira Carr is almost too trusting of 'NormalTypicals' in Maynard's text, Christopher Boone is very aware of a possible threat from them.

The Unrestricted or Restricted Setting

A heterogeneous character placed in a homogeneous setting further emphasises the neurodiversity of the protagonist. With regards to place, the theoretical framework for developing heterogeneity within a novel can often include a *restricted* setting, one which highlights the atypicality or idiosyncratic behaviours of a character. For Eleanor in Honeyman's novel it's a common workplace, for Elvira in Maynard's it's the clinical setting of a hospital or the local nursing home, and in Backman's text it's the normal workings of a suburban neighbourhood which Ove encounters on his daily "inspection of the street."¹²⁴ In both *Rain Reign* (2014) and *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (2003) it is a school — an institution, arguably known for regulating an individual's academic and social behaviours. In other words, the school emphasises Christopher's and Rose's rigid behaviours, atypical thinking patterns and cognitive fixations — Rose with homophones and Christopher with numbers.

With that said, it would be possible to read the shed as being a restrictive setting for my character of June; however, it is simply a *physically* restrictive setting. There is an absence of social restrictions often placed on an individual in an institution such as a school or within a cul-de-sac of neighbours, so June is somewhat free to exhibit her social and emotional idiosyncrasies within the garden and the shed. It is therefore, unrestrictive in nature, as is the main setting for the novel.

The city of London offers a geographical base for both *June in the Garden* and for *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* possibly because "a London setting provides a symbolic representation of the relationship between the centre (in the form of the capital city) and

¹²³ Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, 34, 14, 34, 44.

¹²⁴ Fredrik Backman, *A Man Called Ove* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2014): 6.

the marginalised characters that the texts portray...London forms an opportunity for a striking metaphorical repositioning of once marginalised voices (in the forms of their characters) within the centre.”¹²⁵

Arguably London is much like Glasgow within the context of my narrative. Like Glasgow, London is an urban setting, providing more opportunities for social interactions with others, and a city that has been “defined and redefined”,¹²⁶ also similarly to Glasgow. Although *June in the Garden* is deeply-rooted in Scotland because of my own personal ties to it, and a desire to produce a novel for the Scottish literary market, the relocation of June to London is important because the city “has long been associated with the journey towards maturity which young protagonists embark on.”¹²⁷ Perhaps it mirrors June’s social-emotional detachment, because it too is a place “of fragmentation and disorder” allowing for “fragmented identity constructions.”¹²⁸

Allen also argues that “The conclusion to *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* clearly expresses how the journey that Christopher has undertaken has made things better for him and changed his life as he realises the full potential of his abilities, and he is able to look forward positively to the future”, which could not have been possible without the destination of London being his “call to adventure” because the city “has given Christopher a way of understanding the world”, much like it gives June.¹²⁹ She displays a ‘fragmented’ sense of self and identity due to the sudden absence of her mother and the complete removal of routine and structure, and the London setting for her journey furthers this notion that the identity she attempts to construct herself over the course of the summer is one that is splintered and temporary. The shift from Glasgow to London is

¹²⁵ Claire Allen, *London Fiction at the Millennium* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020): 12.

¹²⁶ Allen, *London Fiction at the Millennium*, 14.

¹²⁷ Allen, *London Fiction at the Millennium*, 66.

¹²⁸ Allen, *London Fiction at the Millennium*, 84, 96.

¹²⁹ Allen, *London Fiction at the Millennium*, 95, 69, 96.

therefore written out of necessity, because without a new narrative setting June cannot be challenged to understand the world beyond her usual confines.

Other literary tropes pertaining to the “the quest narrative” of London-based works of fiction include those that can also be associated with *June in the Garden*, such as: “the road of trials; atonement with the father; the achieving/finding of the boon; the refusal of return; rescue from without; the crossing of the return threshold; and the freedom to live.”¹³⁰

One differing conclusion to *June in the Garden* from *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* is that with Christopher “his journey and experiences there have served the purpose of him reaching the next stage of his journey to adulthood” and therefore end as he has essentially “outgrown the capital.”¹³¹ Whereas for June, there is no such conclusion to her story. She has not yet ‘outgrown’ London because the novel ends when the next stage of her journey begins. She has finally been accepted inside the family home in Landsdowne Road, albeit temporarily, but how her relationship with her father progresses after that is intentionally left ambiguous, open to the reader’s imagination and interpretation.

Language and Semantic Patterns

Language is another aspect to consider when creating a heterogeneous character because it contributes to the construction of identity and because it is linked to setting, to the colloquiums and dialects that June is hearing in the environment around her.

Furthermore, not only is language the “means by which characters communicate with each other” and with the reader,¹³² but it is how characters interact with and understand the fictional world in which they exist. And “although we expect it to be authentic”, the reader also understands

¹³⁰ Allen, *London Fiction at the Millennium*, 97, 69.

¹³¹ Allen, *London Fiction at the Millennium*, 97.

¹³² Monika Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* (New York: Routledge, 2009): 64.

that “Spoken exchanges in novels are grammatically and syntactically correct; they are more concise than real-life conversations since numerous repetitions, rephrasing, fillers and many other features of spoken conversation have been eliminated.”¹³³ As an author, how we select and organise language on the page can reveal a lot to the reader about our character’s ‘mind style,’ a term coined by British linguist Roger Fowler to refer to “any distinctive linguistic presentation of an individual mental self.”¹³⁴ It is both a stylistic choice we make as a writer and a psychological choice we make for our protagonist. If “literature is the creative use of language...in the context of general linguistic description” then theoretically a heterogeneous or, neurodiverse, ‘mind style’ can be “equated with the use of unorthodox or deviant forms of language”,¹³⁵ with the terms unorthodox or deviation referring to an avoidance of stylistic norms; for example, clear and concise direct or indirect speech patterns. Therefore, this section will briefly analysis the *atypical* stylistic choices some authors have made to represent heterogenous voices in their fictional work.

In Mark Haddon’s novel, the way Christopher relates to the world around him is evident in the language Haddon uses, specifically syntax and semantics. Much of the narrative is written very plainly and matter-of-fact, lacking phrases that have more than one meaning. The lexical repetition of Christopher’s sentencing and conversational exchanges with secondary characters reveal a child-like quality. Sentences are either short and direct, or long, often running on and including conjunctions such as ‘And’ or ‘Then’ to depict the fast-moving mind of a child seemingly unable to mentally organise thoughts and separate ideas:

Then we went to the cafe and Father had plaice and chips and apple pie and ice cream and a pot of Earl Grey tea and I had my sandwiches and I read the guidebook

¹³³ Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, 65.

¹³⁴ Roger Fowler, *Linguistics and the Novel* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1977): 103.

¹³⁵ Geoffrey Leech, *Language in Literature: Style and Foregrounding* (New York: Routledge, 2015): 12.

to the zoo.¹³⁶

Whilst some individuals displaying low-functioning social-emotional skills use a “lexicon of non-verbal sounds, song fragments, and catchphrases”, and “riffs of scat singing,” “little melodies,” and “repertoire of echolalia”¹³⁷ to communicate with the world, others struggle to decipher idioms, figures of speech and jokes. Elvira in Maynard’s 2017 novel displays this difficulty:

Oh, do keep up, Elvira was something Mother often said, when I asked her what was happening in a Foreign Film, or what someone had meant exactly, by puzzling phrases like *We must meet up soon* (why must we?) or *A change is as good as a rest* (but it’s completely different) or *It’s as plain as the nose on your face* (why is my nose plain?).¹³⁸

Difficulties with interpreting meanings in conversation is a frequent occurrence for Elvira — “when I’d been unsure how to answer a question, she’d said, ‘Cat got your tongue?’ and I’d run across the road, crying, thinking the ginger cat opposite was eating it, and Mother and Jane had been angry. I knew now it was a Figure of Speech.”¹³⁹ And, often when she does this in public, her mother becomes frustrated and cruel to her, showing the reader the extent of verbal abuse Elvira experiences in the home, which further highlights a possible RAD diagnosis.

Similar semantic patterns can be found in Mark Haddon’s narrative about a boy displaying social-emotional idiosyncrasies, much like my character of June and the other protagonists

¹³⁶ Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, 86.

¹³⁷ Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 46.

¹³⁸ Maynard, *The Seven Imperfect Rules of Elvira Carr*: 49.

¹³⁹ Maynard, *The Seven Imperfect Rules of Elvira Carr*: 114.

mentioned in this analysis. Like Elvira, Christopher also struggles with jokes, telling the reader “I cannot tell jokes because I do not understand them.”¹⁴⁰ He also makes the observation that:

people often talk using metaphors. These are examples of metaphors

I laughed my socks off.

He was the apple of her eye.

They had a skeleton in the cupboard.

We had a real pig of a day.

The dog was stone dead.¹⁴¹

Christopher continues to reflect upon the nuances of adult conversations in a manner that highlights his cognitive preoccupation, or fixation, with particular subject matters:

The word *metaphor* means carrying something from one place to another, and it comes from the Greek words **μετα** (which means *from one place to another*) and **φερειν** (which means *to carry*), and it is when you describe something by using a word for something that it isn't. This means that the word *metaphor* is a metaphor.¹⁴²

Semantic threads connect Haddon's novel with my own, with June also displaying difficulties with types of figurative language. Another novel with a school-aged protagonist displaying behaviours one would associate with ASD, is *Rain, Reign*. In the novel Rose shares her

¹⁴⁰ Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, 8.

¹⁴¹ Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, 15.

¹⁴² Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, 15.

fascination with homonyms with the reader: “I am Rose Howard and my first name has a homonym. To be accurate, it has a homophone” and “I like homonyms a lot.”¹⁴³ Rose interacts with her world through homonyms and at times, narrating her story in this form of figurative language: “I stand on the porch for a moment and look at Rain/Reign/Rein.”¹⁴⁴

Those with an emotional support network, possibly a caregiver, a teacher or a colleague, can practise social language skills, a common protocol in many educational settings when working with students who display social language delays. Rose Howard has access to a teacher at her school who “encourages me to think up conversation starters. Some conversations starters about me that do not have anything to do with homonyms or rules or prime numbers.”¹⁴⁵ And Don Tilman is encouraged by his colleague to “undertake some face-to-face dating to practice my social skills” in *The Rosie Project*.¹⁴⁶ In my own creative novel *June in the Garden*, June lacks a partner to practise with after her mother passes away: “There are lots of things I want to tell her, particularly because without Mother, I have not had an opportunity to practise my social skills in real-time conversation.”¹⁴⁷

In these novels, language is both the key to unlocking the world around these characters and the door that separates them from their peers, further attributing to their neurodiversity. Elvira Carr, Christopher Boone, Rose Howard and June Wilson are acutely aware of semantics and pragmatics, but also challenged by the presence of them in a social context.

¹⁴³ Ann M. Martin, *Rain Reign* (New York: Feiwel and Friends, 2014): 3, 4.

¹⁴⁴ Martin, *Rain Reign*, 52.

¹⁴⁵ Martin, *Rain Reign*, 6.

¹⁴⁶ Simsion, *The Rosie Project*, 34.

¹⁴⁷ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 13.

Relationship with Rules

The complex relationship these protagonists have with routine, structure, rules and boundaries is another common thread that runs through many of the novels examined, including my own. An acute awareness of it and sometimes, an obsession with it, can highlight the heterogenous character in fictional narratives, often impacting and influencing their relationships with others, and with the world around them.

When examining neurodiversity, the individuals in Steve Silberman’s *NeuroTribes* depict a “complicated relationship with rules and expectations.”¹⁴⁸ Rules imply structure and predictability, two elements that were deemed crucial for people with ASD and RAD in the psychology section of this exegesis. Individuals with a complex view of rules frequently review them, and sometimes even share them with others. The fictional character Rose Howard states in *Rain Reign* that “Making a mistake is accidental. Breaking a rule is deliberate.”¹⁴⁹ She goes on to further distance herself socially from her school peers by pointing out ‘rule-breakers’ to her teacher — “Look! Rule number six. ‘All games, supplies, art materials, and books must be returned to their proper places when not in use.’ He broke the rule!”¹⁵⁰

This notion that a relationship with rules exists in these novels is one furthered by my own protagonist's desire for rules, because to her rules mean certainty, and certainty means predictability and stability, as well as an adherence to schedule and routine. In *June in the Garden*, the character of Henry understands and recognises some of June's boundaries, for example: “What is it?” Half-Brother asked, thankfully respecting the unspoken rule that I did not like to be touched.”¹⁵¹ This relationship with rules and expectations isn’t challenged until much later, when June’s need for

¹⁴⁸ Silberman, *NeuroTribes*, 91.

¹⁴⁹ Martin, *Rain Reign*, 3.

¹⁵⁰ Martin, *Rain Reign*, 50.

¹⁵¹ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 221.

routine and control comes between them, particularly when she is faced with the dilemma of splitting the final cheese slices for their lunch.

Rules are also a significant theme in Frances Maynard's 2017 novel, aptly titled *The Seven Imperfect Rules of Elvira Carr*. In it Elvira develops a set of rules to interact with the world, that need to be constantly rewritten as new social situations arise:

The Seven Rules

Rule 1: Being polite and respectful is always a good idea.

Rule 2: If you look or sound different you won't fit in.

Rule 3: Conversation doesn't just exchange Facts - it conveys how you're feeling.

Rule 4: You learn by making mistakes.

Rule 5: Not everyone who is nice to me is my friend.

Rule 6: It is better to be too diplomatic than too honest.

Rule 7: Rules change depending on the situation and the person you are speaking to.¹⁵²

These are created because, according to Elvira, "We didn't understand NormalTypicals' Rules, often we weren't even *aware* of them" so "Keeping to these would help me to move around the world of NormalTypicals, without getting into trouble."¹⁵³ Additionally, there are checklists so she can establish whether a rule has been followed or not.¹⁵⁴

Elvira realises the world is not black and white, and trying to navigate it with a spreadsheet of perceived guidelines for fitting in will not help her: "It seemed I had done *something* wrong but I

¹⁵² Maynard, *The Seven Imperfect Rules of Elvira Carr*, 84.

¹⁵³ Maynard, *The Seven Imperfect Rules of Elvira Carr*, 84.

¹⁵⁴ Maynard, *The Seven Imperfect Rules of Elvira Carr*, 94, 103.

couldn't work out which Rule, or Rules, I'd broken."¹⁵⁵ Like June, Elvira discovers it is her relationship with rules, specifically her own misinterpretation of them, that restrict her interactions and understanding of the social world. Sadly rule number five is one that is learned the hard way after she is victim to an assault by a work colleague.

Awareness of Time and Space

Broadly speaking, "Time has always played an important role in theories of narrative, given that we tend to think of stories as sequences of events"; referencing time can elevate it from being just "background elements in narrative" to becoming "part of its fabric."¹⁵⁶ A character acknowledging narrative time can also be linked to this complicated relationship with rules and expectations previously discussed, often making the heterogeneous protagonist acutely aware of these details, whether it be the time, the day of the week, the exact date, or in June's case, the almanac's expected forecast for the day and sometimes the time of sunrise or sunset:¹⁵⁷

<p><i>Gardener's Almanac:</i> Light rain showers High of 19° Sunrise: 04:43AM</p>
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With regards to the all-important opening line of a novel, both Sara Baume's *Spill, Simmer, Falter, Wither* and Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* start their stories with an acknowledgement of time or day. While Haddon's opening line of, "It was 7 minutes after midnight"¹⁵⁸ refers to the exact time on a clock, Baume's refers to the day of the week: "You

¹⁵⁵ Maynard, *The Seven Imperfect Rules of Elvira Carr*, 110.

¹⁵⁶ Teresa Bridgeman, "Time and Space," in *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, ed. David Herman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 53.

¹⁵⁷ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 190.

¹⁵⁸ Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, 1.

find me on a Tuesday, on my Tuesday trip to town.”¹⁵⁹ I also employed this device in *June in the Garden*, beginning with both a reference to the time and the temperature:

4:12PM.

The waiting room in Maryhill Community Centre is cold, at least five degrees cooler than what we keep our house thermostat at.¹⁶⁰

I considered it to be an appropriate trait for her character and for an individual displaying RAD, based on my readings and from what I had learned from research into social-emotional detachment disorders. It connects back to the theory that a person desiring rules and certainty, equally desires to know the time of day because that particular knowledge impacts their schedule and their routine.

The Rosie Project and *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* do not immediately begin with time/day referencing but feature it in the opening chapter: “we both arrived at exactly 7:00 p.m. as arranged”;¹⁶¹ “From Monday to Friday I come for 8.30.”¹⁶² *A Man Called Ove* delays time referencing until the opening of the second chapter: “It was five to six in the morning when Ove and the cat met for the first time.”¹⁶³

Referencing time/day/month/temperature doesn’t just serve to highlight the ‘simultaneity’ of a story, “locating a narrative in time” or beginning “the narrative proper” but also functions as a platform to show the protagonists’ heightened sense of detail.¹⁶⁴ Like my own, some of the novels

¹⁵⁹ Baume, *Spill, Simmer, Falter, Wither*, 7.

¹⁶⁰ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 11.

¹⁶¹ Simsion, *The Rosie Project*, 5.

¹⁶² Gail Honeyman, *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* (London: HarperCollins, 2017): 4.

¹⁶³ Backman, *A Man Called Ove*, 5.

¹⁶⁴ Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, 43.

mentioned then go on to regularly reference time to again show this awareness, like in *The Rosie Project*: “The lecture was scheduled for 7:00 p.m....I arrived on schedule at 6:57 p.m.”¹⁶⁵ When Don’s schedule is impacted by others, he feels wronged and responsible for getting himself, and those he is providing a lecture to, back on track: “we got started, *eighteen minutes late*. I would need to speak forty-three percent faster to finish on schedule at 8:00 p.m.”¹⁶⁶ His cognitive preoccupation with time threatens the one relationship that ends up being crucial to his social-emotional growth: “it was now 8:01 p.m. and Rosie was not there.”¹⁶⁷ After numerous time conflicts with his love interest, he softens his approach to schedules and routines, declaring: “Time has been redefined”¹⁶⁸ due to his blossoming relationship with Rosie, who is the complete opposite of him.

In *Rain Reign*, time awareness and referencing indicates a rigid relationship with rules, routine, and expectations: “The routine for after school is that Uncle Weldon picks me up at 2:42 p.m. and drops me off at my house between 2:58 and 3:01.”¹⁶⁹

For Christopher in Haddon’s novel, the mention of time and the use of the future phrases *going to* and *I will* indicate a cognitive preoccupation with the future and an uncertainty about what lies ahead: “I am going to prove that I’m not stupid...I’m going to take my A level in maths and I’m going to get an A grade”, so “I will be able to get a job and earn lots of money and I will be able to pay someone who can look after me.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Simsion, *The Rosie Project*, 7.

¹⁶⁶ Simsion, *The Rosie Project*, 10.

¹⁶⁷ Simsion, *The Rosie Project*, 49.

¹⁶⁸ Simsion, *The Rosie Project*, 65.

¹⁶⁹ Martin, *Rain Reign*, 59.

¹⁷⁰ Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, 44, 45.

June in the Garden also mentions time frequently throughout to show not just an awareness of it, but to emphasise a further loss in identity, associating who she was with her previous routinised life with her mother and her *M&S* work colleagues back in Glasgow:

I have tried hard to readjust to the new routine since arriving here, pushing back my breakfast time by a whole five minutes while the last of the Wilsons trickle out the door to work/school.¹⁷¹

This sense of a loss in identity and how it connects to time is one that also exists in Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*. Although the character of Joy Stone is one I did not initially consider as 'neurodiverse' due to origins of psychological trauma being quite prevalent in the narrative, I did eventually conclude that the theme of social-emotional detachment is too prominent to ignore. It is Joy's socially and emotionally-detached behaviours, and how they visually manifest on the page, that makes Galloway's text important for my research. And like the other novels, Galloway also employs the literary device of time referencing. But for the character of Joy Stone, it is not the knowledge of time that she seeks, unlike the other characters discussed, it is the *passing* of time that is emphasised, to highlight her concern with the process of "lasting through."¹⁷² For example, there are 121 mentions of the word 'time' in Galloway's novel, perhaps to emphasise Joy's complex relationship with it — "I know the waiting isn't over yet. There is always something not taken into account. Something more to come."¹⁷³ Joy is fixated on what will come next because, "Suspicion is never enough."¹⁷⁴ For her, there is never an end to her trauma, and never closure.

¹⁷¹ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 156.

¹⁷² Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 54.

¹⁷³ Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 147.

¹⁷⁴ Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 77.

Representing the Mother-Daughter Relationship

Another pattern associated with heterogeneous characterisation, and one that pertains directly to RAD, is the complicated relationship between the protagonist and the mother. Texts I will be referring to include my own and novels by Frances Maynard and Gail Honeyman that portray an anxious, ambivalent, absent or abusive mother. In these texts, it can be argued that the character of ‘Mother’, creates a protagonist that is socially and emotionally detached, displaying heterogeneous social behaviours with others, because “Anxious and inconsistent mothering makes children afraid to explore the world. They grow up needing other people to help them manage many aspects of their lives.”¹⁷⁵

For Elvira Carr, an abusive and resentful mother makes her worry about “the Modern World. Managing it without upsetting people or getting shouted at, or there being Incidents.”¹⁷⁶ When her mother is placed in nursing care, Elvira becomes dependent on her next door neighbour Sylvia to carry on this mother role and essentially, tell her what to do.

For my protagonist, soon after moving into the garden shed, June begins to depend on her brother for meals, conversation, suggestions of how to initiate communications with their father and for access to the kinds of routines she once shared with her mother, such as watching *Strictly Come Dancing* on Saturdays. But over time the relationship with her brother, a person who also displays atypical behaviours and struggles to form his own attachments to same-age peers, will grow into one that’s more authentic, ‘normal’ and *secure*. Her interactions and experiences with her younger half-brother will help her “Develop healthy affect regulation”, “Create space for thought”, “Promote self-awareness”, “Build a stronger sense of self” and “Strengthen capacity for empathy and compassion.”¹⁷⁷ The attachment that forms between them will act as a somewhat “attachment-based

¹⁷⁵ Cundy, *Anxiously Attached: Understanding and Working with Preoccupied Attachment*, 6.

¹⁷⁶ Maynard, *The Seven Imperfect Rules of Elvira Carr*, 67.

¹⁷⁷ Cundy, *Anxiously Attached: Understanding and Working with Preoccupied Attachment*, 16.

psychotherapy”¹⁷⁸ for her, helping her to find resolution with her past and with the ambivalent attachment patterns that have formed from the past.

However, for Honeyman’s character in *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*, the mother-daughter dyad is more than just “anxious and inconsistent”, it’s *traumatic*.¹⁷⁹ Generally, trauma in fiction can be “defined by its intensity, by the subject’s incapacity to respond adequately to it, and by the upheaval and long-lasting effects that it brings about in the physical organization.”¹⁸⁰ Eleanor’s own trauma-initiated neurodiversity does not stem from one single trauma but from a long period of traumatic events occurring throughout childhood. Her traumatic past shapes her present atypical thought-processes and social responses, and alienates her from wider society thus making her appear more atypical to the outside world. Like June and Elvira, Eleanor is aware she doesn’t ‘fit in’ but unlike them, she cares about that fact: “These magazines could tell me which clothes and shoes to wear, how to have my hair styled” because “I aspire to average.”¹⁸¹

Context surrounding the extent of her trauma is woven in through the occasional flashback and subtle nods to her physical appearance, such as: “ridged, white contours of scar tissues that slither across my right cheek, starting at my temple and running all the way down to my chin.”¹⁸² Additionally, certain sections of dialogue with a medical professional drop in further clues about an abusive past: “You’re still of the view you don’t want to know anything else about the incident, or about your mother, I understand?”¹⁸³ Additional trauma inflicted from having an “absent parent”¹⁸⁴ — her father — coupled with a neglectful and abusive mother suggests Eleanor’s heterogeneous

¹⁷⁸ Cundy, *Anxiously Attached: Understanding and Working with Preoccupied Attachment*, 16.

¹⁷⁹ Cundy, *Anxiously Attached: Understanding and Working with Preoccupied Attachment*, 6.

¹⁸⁰ Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002): 2.

¹⁸¹ Honeyman, *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*, 30.

¹⁸² Honeyman, *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*, 10.

¹⁸³ Honeyman, *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*, 53.

¹⁸⁴ Honeyman, *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*, 31.

differences when it comes to emotionally attaching and socially engaging could in fact be a product of RAD as well, given the associated behaviours and established family history of maltreatment.

Whereas Eleanor refers to her mother as ‘Mummy’ throughout the novel — “Mummy has always told me that I am ugly, freakish, vile”¹⁸⁵ — Elvira uses the ceremonious title of ‘Mother’ in Maynard’s text. Wanting to create a similar sense of detachment and emotional distance between mother and daughter, my character June Wilson also uses the formal title of ‘Mother’ — “Winter was also a time when Mother became small and quiet, choosing to spend most evenings in her bedroom with a bottle of red wine, her pills and her photo albums.”¹⁸⁶

Finding fictional works with a “focus on mother/child relations”¹⁸⁷ was integral to my creation of June. As explained in the first section, the psychology behind the characterisation of a young woman with RAD is deeply embedded with this idea of a fractured bond between caregiver and infant, particularly in the first few years of a baby’s life. Although June did not endure physical or verbal abuse from her mother, unlike the characters of Eleanor and Elvira, she did experience significant and detrimental neglect and loss when her mother left her. I selected the two texts *The Seven Imperfect Rules of Elvira Carr* and *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* because, like *June in the Garden*, they are concerned “with daughters deeply identified with their mothers.”¹⁸⁸ I also wanted June’s identity to be tied to her mother, to further June’s identity loss when her mother dies. The emotional tie between a mother and her baby is so strong and vital to a young infant’s development that if it’s severed or damaged it could lead to a plethora of social-emotional issues in later life, and this is what the reader is observing with adult June.

Although the two novels selected and discussed in this section arguably endeavour to “elucidate the dilemma of the public’s relationship to the traumatised” and “expand their audiences’

¹⁸⁵ Honeyman, *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine*, 30.

¹⁸⁶ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 158.

¹⁸⁷ Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, 4.

¹⁸⁸ Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, 4.

awareness of trauma by engaging them with personalized, experientially oriented means of narration that highlight the painful ambivalence that characterizes traumatic memory and warn us that trauma reproduces itself if left unattended”,¹⁸⁹ my intent as an author was to emphasise an absence of emotion in June, rather than a presence of trauma. By threading through subtle flashbacks or anecdotes about the time spent with her mother before her passing, I sought to highlight the lack of emotional capacity that June exhibits because of her RAD diagnosis.

Trauma is touched upon in some of the other heterogeneous novels discussed, delicately balancing the quirkiness and sometimes comedy of heterogeneity with a darker undertone of loss, and in some cases, caregiver abuse, neglect or absence. In both Baume’s and Backman’s texts, the protagonist has recently lost a loved one. In *Spill, Simmer, Falter, Wither*, Ray is still processing the death of his father and often refers to a “sadness that’s in me”,¹⁹⁰ whilst in *A Man Called Ove*, the main character is still grieving the loss of his wife as is evident in the conversations he imagines still having with her — “Nothing works when you’re not at home...She doesn’t answer...I miss you,” he whispers. It’s been six months since she died.”¹⁹¹

Trauma is a central theme to Galloway’s *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (1989), a narrative steeped in detachment with lines such as, “I watch myself from the corner of the room.”¹⁹² Just as Joy’s lover drowned, there is an ongoing echo of the trauma, with Joy drowning in her own sorrow and in societal expectations, eventually causing a separation between her and the world around, leaving us with a “novel of the most profound alienation, manifest not only in psychological and social but also in artistic terms.”¹⁹³ More will be said on these ‘artistic terms’ in the *Narrative Form* section of this exegesis.

¹⁸⁹ Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, 2, 3.

¹⁹⁰ Baume, *Spill, Simmer, Falter, Wither*, 51.

¹⁹¹ Backman, *A Man Called Ove*, 34.

¹⁹² Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 7.

¹⁹³ Alex Thomson, “Alienation and community in contemporary Scottish fiction: The case of Janice Galloway’s *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*,” *Community in Modern Scottish Literature*, ed. Scott Lyall (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 167.

Focalisation

The narratological meaning of ‘focalisation’ is the “point from which a narrator views fictional events and characters as if visually.”¹⁹⁴ This can be “either fixed (adhering to one character throughout the text), variable (shifting between different characters) or multiple (shifting between different characters while retelling the same event).”¹⁹⁵ This final section in *Heterogeneous Characterisation* will endeavour to elucidate my creative decision to narrate my novel in a fixed first person point of view.

For *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* (Galloway, 1989), “The novel’s first-person perspective and its use of typographical breakdown” indicate “points of intense psychological or textual disturbance.”¹⁹⁶ Most of the other fictional texts discussed in this thesis utilise a similar point of view, including *Rain Reign* (Martin, 2014), *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (Haddon, 2003), *Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine* (Honeyman, 2017), *The Rosie Project* (Simsion, 2013), and *The Seven Imperfect Rules of Elvira Carr* (Maynard, 2017), suggesting neurodiverse thinking patterns and social-emotional detachment might be better represented by “opting for a first-person narrator or adopting the point of view of a character.”¹⁹⁷ Moreover, it can be argued that the social language gap between neurodiverse protagonists and neurotypicals can be further highlighted by this restriction in knowledge caused by using a first person point of view, where readers “do not have access to other minds and are restricted to what they have learnt in the course of the story”, much like June is because her condition impacts her ability to process and comprehend non-verbal cues.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, 26.

¹⁹⁵ Burhard Niederhoff, “Perspective — Point of View,” *Handbook of Narratology*, edited by Peter Hühn et al (Berlin: De Gruyter, Inc., 2014): 698.

¹⁹⁶ Thomson, “Alienation and community in contemporary Scottish fiction: The case of Janice Galloway’s *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*,” 166.

¹⁹⁷ Niederhoff, “Perspective — Point of View,” 696.

¹⁹⁸ Niederhoff, “Perspective — Point of View,” 699.

By comparison, Backman's novel *A Man Called Ove* (2014) is narrated in an omniscient third person point of view, where "the narrator and the protagonist are different individuals" and the "narrator is frequently nothing more than a disembodied voice", speaking from the "other of the other world."¹⁹⁹ Whilst Backman's use of a third person point of view finds a balance "between the closeness of an inside view and the distance of the third person narrator standing back with the reader in moments",²⁰⁰ *June in the Garden* conveys more of an 'inside view' to "create an intimacy" between the reader and June. Perhaps that particular perspective emphasises that heterogeneous individuals like June Wilson are "representations of people, not mere constructs" and that by employing a first person point of view it evokes an emotional response from readers that is "fundamentally similar in nature to our responses to real people in the world."²⁰¹ A first person point of view arguably gives a stronger voice to June and to her social-emotional detachment, with "the representation of the story" being "influenced by the position, personality and values" of June, and "possibly, other, more hypothetical entities in the storyworld";²⁰² for example, the visual, or typographical elements of the narrative.

Although the point of view is in fixed first-person, the narration style also "suggests that we are viewing a character from the outside, from a spatial and possibly from an emotional and ideological distance."²⁰³ This was achieved through simple, plain language, from a person acutely observant of their immediate environment: "The morning air smells different today. It smells new and fresh, and is filled with the scent of lavender from the back flowerbed."²⁰⁴ Observations of

¹⁹⁹ Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology*, 31, 266.

²⁰⁰ Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, 29, 28.

²⁰¹ Currie, *Postmodern Narrative Theory*, 32.

²⁰² Niederhoff, "Perspective — Point of View," 692.

²⁰³ Niederhoff, "Perspective — Point of View," 693.

²⁰⁴ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 336.

surroundings, people and conversations are scattered throughout the novel, to better create a profile of an individual with suspected RAD.

(2) Narrative Form

With regard to narrative form, this next section will examine and argue that heterogeneous characterisation, particularly surrounding social-emotional detachment, can also be represented through typography and visual design to frame the story and underline the atypicality or ‘uniqueness’ of the character and content.

Although “Such techniques do not seem like classical storytelling methods”,²⁰⁵ an arrangement of visuals can strengthen and emphasise the degree of detachment and social disengagement depicted in a narrative. It is my goal not to adhere to ‘classical storytelling methods’ because June is not the classical heroine of a plot. She can, at times, be the unlikeable, enigmatic, anti-heroine.

A conventional printed novel is usually “typeset in a ‘box’ surrounded by outer margins wide enough that the reader’s thumbs do not obscure the text, and a gutter (inside margin) wide enough that lines of text do not curve into the spine of the book”,²⁰⁶ and anything outside of that framework can be considered unconventional.

The narratological term typography is essentially “the art of designing text.”²⁰⁷ Whilst most physical forms of a novel are presented in a traditional manner as just mentioned, in simple text form with the standard page numbers, margin width and chapter titles, some novels intentionally deviate from this framework. This can be achieved in a variety of ways, including making “changes in the typeface”, “overlapping or omitted text”, a “physical disruption of the text” and just

²⁰⁵ Allen, *London Fiction at the Millennium*, 96.

²⁰⁶ Zoe Sadokierski, “Disturbing the text: typographic devices in literary fiction,” in *Book 2.0*, accessed September 2019, <https://zoedadokierski.com/disturbing-the-text-typographic-devices-in-literary-fiction>

²⁰⁷ Sadokierski, “Disturbing the text: typographic devices in literary fiction.”

generally, “graphic and typographic ‘quirks’ that are recognisable at a glance.”²⁰⁸ Furthermore, I will be including the following devices as typographical in form also as they impact the arrangement of text: numbers, formulas, lists, symbols, logos, transcripts, marginalia, illustrations, font style, font size and font colour, and nonconventional chapter headings.

Formatting, Spacing and Punctuation

Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) plays with formatting, such as unconventional spacing, as well as other typographical devices, to narrate three generational perspectives within the Schell family. The various typesetting styles Safran Foer uses are to “distinguish between the three different narrative voices” and “to disrupt pace and the rhythm of reading in order to communicate gaps in conversation or pregnant silences.”²⁰⁹ In the chapters narrated by Grandma Schell, the elongated spaces add a conversational element, as if the character’s letter is direct speech, words spoken to her grandson, held back after so many years:

I had a letter from everyone I knew. I laid them out on my bedroom
floor, and organized them by what they shared. One hundred letters.
I was always moving them around, trying to make connections. I
wanted to understand.²¹⁰

Her husband’s muteness is represented through pages blank bar a few words in the centre surrounded by white space, such as “The regular, please” and “Help” to add a sense of quiet and stillness to his narrative, and to accurately depict the notebook in which he writes common

²⁰⁸ Sadokierski, “Disturbing the text: typographic devices in literary fiction.”

²⁰⁹ Sadokierski, “Disturbing the text: typographic devices in literary fiction.”

²¹⁰ Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (London: Penguin Books, 2005): 79.

responses to questions he has predicted will arise in his day, for example, “You want a cup of coffee, Thomas?”²¹¹ This typographical device “also echoes the profound loneliness of Thomas Senior’s world – the whiteness of the page surrounding the line of text breaks his relentless, unpunctuated narrative, effecting a sense of isolation and silence.”²¹² When Thomas becomes more prominent in the narrative, returning to the story and to the family after years of abandonment, the pages in the novel become saturated with tightly-packed sentences which eventually overlap to blacken the pages. The degree of “visual juxtaposition between this heavy ink and the whiteness of the single-line daybook entries visualize the complexity of his heartache.”²¹³ The reader becomes immersed in his emotions, as the text is absorbed into the once blank pages.

Moreover, letters and newspaper articles are presented in various typesetting styles and sizes to make them stand out and to convey a narrative journey after the loss of a loved one, similar to June’s letter exchanges with her half-brother after the passing of her mother.²¹⁴ Their letters are presented in different font styles too.

The typography in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) also highlights the neurodiverse thinking patterns of nine-year-old Oskar, who displays above average cognitive abilities in his conversations with others: “most people my age don’t know what that means.”²¹⁵ When questioned about the typography, Safran Foer commented in an interview: “Oskar is a very visual kid – he’s an inventor. I wanted the book to feel like one of his inventions, to be flamboyant in the same way that his imagination is.”²¹⁶ Safran Foer adds to this invention with black and white

²¹¹ Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 23, 26, 17.

²¹² Sadokierski, “Disturbing the text: typographic devices in literary fiction.”

²¹³ Sadokierski, “Disturbing the text: typographic devices in literary fiction.”

²¹⁴ Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 10, 11.

²¹⁵ Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 2.

²¹⁶ Joel Whitney, *An Interview with Jonathan Safran Foer*, accessed 13 May 2021, <https://www.joelwhitney.net/jonathansafranfoer.html>

photographs — some blurry and out of focus — and pages marked up with red ink or filled with scribbles made with an array of coloured markers.²¹⁷

In Steven Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts* (2007), the formatting, sentencing and spacing serve to place Eric outside of his own story, existing in a separate narrative universe, a “conceptual stream with no mass or weight or matter and no ties to gravity or time.”²¹⁸ This is a universe where conceptual fish swim in that stream, feeding on “promises thoughts stories plans whispers lusts lies tricks secrets longings” because “life will grow and exist and evolve anywhere, even in the most inhospitable and unlikely of places.”²¹⁹

Steven Hall wants the reader to feel as disorientated as his character, who suffers from dissociative amnesia, a disorder that significantly impacts his memory recall, causing large chunks of memories to be irretrievable with each relapse. His condition is revealed to the reader in the first chapter, with the first associated visual being presented in the second chapter in the form of fragmented text, scattering letters in a white box spelling out the names of extinct species of primates²²⁰ — “particles of the conceptual other world, composed of the thoughts and memories of all humankind.”²²¹ Other plays with formatting exist, including the use of italics to depict an individual's emotional response as he struggles to process what little information he has on his past life: “*I have a condition. A disorder. What was that going to mean?*”²²²

Font size, spacing and shading play a role in the novel too, as do textbook articles, letters, word maps, a blueprint of a conceptual boat, all to physically form the ‘Ludovician’²²³ — a conceptual shark that feeds on “ideas, thoughts, fragments, story shards, dreams, memories” until

²¹⁷ Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 53-55, 62, 103, 208-215, 45-49.

²¹⁸ Steven Hall, *Raw Shark Texts* (Edinburgh: Cannongate, 2007): 55.

²¹⁹ Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*, 315, 55.

²²⁰ Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*, 16.

²²¹ Sadokierski, “Disturbing the text: typographic devices in literary fiction.”

²²² Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*, 17.

²²³ Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*, 266, 81, 229, 300.

the “victim’s memory and identity have been completely consumed.”²²⁴ The words and splintered sentences that form the shark’s outline become darker and larger as the Ludovician approaches the conceptual boat, the *Orpheus*.²²⁵ When Eric falls into the conceptual ocean and is pulled to safety by Scout, the incomplete sentence “Fingers clamped my wrist and forearm and dragged me back up towards the surface with a”²²⁶ is repeated several times over the next nine pages, alternating in dark to light to convey the intensity and tension. The final page of the novel is saturated in dark print and half-finished sentences, that bleed into each other to form the head of the deceased shark.

Another example of creative formatting, spacing, and sentencing is Max Porter’s novel *Lanny* (2019), where the main text is rearranged, at times wrapping around the character of Lanny, who never talks to readers directly, and fading into the background. Sentences are written, formatted and presented on the page in such a way that it appears to intersect with the nature it describes, becoming part of the forest much like the fabled character of Dead Papa Toothwort.

The novel alternates between short sections of prose and paragraphs that visually resemble poetry, written and presented as if heard, carried in the wind from the village through the forest to Toothwort. Snippets of conversation are written in italics and printed on the page like strands of breeze as “he reaches in and delicately pulls out threads, a conductor coaxing sound out of an orchestra.”²²⁷

All voices are heard: Lanny’s mother, Lanny’s father, Lanny’s art teacher, the villagers, all except Lanny himself. The protagonist of the book is muted, represented only through the language of others. *Lanny* is arguably a study of language itself, and how it is “used in literary texts, with the aim of relating it to its artistic functions.”²²⁸

²²⁴ Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*, 160, 64.

²²⁵ Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*, 337-375.

²²⁶ Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*, 373-381.

²²⁷ Max Porter, *Lanny* (London: Faber & Faber, 2019): 5.

²²⁸ Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short, *Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose* (London: Longman, 2007): 7.

Whilst one function could be to represent the neurodiverse qualities of Lanny, the protagonist we only interact with through those around him, another function of Porter's chosen linguistic form could relate to tone. Porter utilises the beauty and mystery of nature to form the sentences, and to give the reader an immersive experience that is "part of a textured surface, ripples, moment, shifting in deep-time, story-beating, pulsating, connected to all that is water and all that is air."²²⁹

Examining the physical language, we can see that some sentences are purposefully unfinished, others run on, punctuated only with commas to lengthen and accentuate rhythmic flow, sounding quite poetic in form:

he swims in it, he gobbles it up and wraps himself in it, he rubs it all over himself, he pushes it into his holes, he gargles, plays, punctuates and grazes, licks and slurps at the sound of it, wanting it fizzing on his tongue, this place of his²³⁰

For other sentences, there are no full stops to show an ending, perhaps because "one thing leads to another again and again, time and again, with no such thing as an ending."²³¹ Other sentences lack punctuation completely, especially with dialogue, leaving it to also fade into the narrative, and into the forest with Dead Papa Toothwort, an immortal being that is both everything and nothing at all. The concept of immortality is represented through the never-ending threads of italicised words, pulled from the sleepy village beyond.

²²⁹ Porter, *Lanny*, 214.

²³⁰ Porter, *Lanny*, 7.

²³¹ Porter, *Lanny*, 9.

Some sentences are physically broken apart, pushed onto separate pages by the clatter of village chatter to emphasise the connection between Dead Papa Toothwort and the village he overlooks, a connection which is almost biological in nature, like he is a living part of it. For example, one sentence begins on page 21, “Dead Papa Toothwort remembers when they built this church...”, then is interrupted by snippets of village conversation for the remainder of the page. It continues on page 22, “stone from afar, flint from round here...” and finally ends on page 23.

Other than italics, Porter plays with font in other ways. For example, the opening scene of Dead Papa Toothwort waking is in bold which both establishes the typography in the novel whilst also introducing the muted ominous presence that will move through the village silently and slowly.

Dead Papa Toothwort wakes from his standing nap an acre wide and scrapes off dream dregs of bitumen glistening thick with liquid globs of litter.²³²

Font styles and size are also used to depict changes in point of view and in dialogue volume; for example, when Lanny climbs a tree the font size decreases as he climbs higher then increases as he shouts louder to Pete:

Then from way up above me,

There are bees up here!

There are bees up here!

Pete, there are bees up here!²³³

²³² Porter, *Lanny*, 3.

²³³ Porter, *Lanny*, 56.

In Part 2 of the novel, the exchanges between characters and the switches in point of view are quicker in rhythm and are now simply separated by a plus sign to indicate a change in speaker:

+

Archie, is Lanny up there with you?

+

Theo, have you seen Lanny since school?

+

It's Lanny's mum, she's asking if we've seen Lanny.

+

Jolie's texted asking if we've seen Lanny.²³⁴

And as the panic builds around Lanny's disappearance, the punctuation in the sentences is dropped completely:

a corridor of freezing silence cutting into the hissing lukewarm salt

diving again and again

every time shocking²³⁵

Using italics and placing certain text in bold can be a useful literary device. In amongst the village chaos when Peggy talks directly to Toothwort, her thoughts are in bold like Toothwort's opening chapter, perhaps to imply a connection between the two, much like the connection between

²³⁴ Porter, *Lanny*, 117.

²³⁵ Porter, *Lanny*, 134.

Toothwort and Lanny.²³⁶ Perhaps this notion of *connection*, is ultimately what drives Porter's creative display of language. Overall, his "typographic devices are woven into the fabric of the narrative" and are "integral to the primary text", meaning that "they cannot be removed from one edition to the next without significantly altering the narrative."²³⁷

Similarly, in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, the narrative becomes splintered in some sections, using unfinished sentences to convey a sense of chaos, and more importantly a notion of isolation and alienation:

The point is

The point is

The point²³⁸

The fragmentary elements in Galloway's novel "offers us no concrete natural or social environment, but a circular entrapment in which the domestic interior reflects Joy's consciousness of isolation back at her."²³⁹ Joy exists outside of any known environment and place, which can only be represented visually. The typographical devices, including formatting and form, in Galloway's novel are vital to Joy's narrative.

Haddon (2003) utilises bold text to highlight labels, categories and names: "And when people ask me to remember something I can simply press **Rewind** and **Fast Forward** and **Pause**."²⁴⁰

²³⁶ Porter, *Lanny*, 150.

²³⁷ Sadokierski, "Disturbing the text: typographic devices in literary fiction."

²³⁸ Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 107.

²³⁹ Thomson, "Alienation and community in contemporary Scottish fiction: The case of Janice Galloway's *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*," 167.

²⁴⁰ Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, 76.

My favorite animals were:

1. **RANDYMAN**, which is the name of the oldest **Red-Faced Black Spider**

Monkey (*Ateles paniscus paniscus*) ever kept in captivity.²⁴¹

In *June in the Garden*, the use of bold imply signs, important to June's journey to and around London: "Outside the window, a large sign reads **KING'S CROSS**"²⁴² and the use of italics emphasises sentences or words that require additional processing time for June:

Above the living room archway is a long silver banner emblazoned with red

lettering: **Happy Birthday Dad**

Happy Birthday Dad.

It appears to be Mr Wilson's birthday, although I haven't been informed of this fact.²⁴³

Font colour is also experimented with to give insight to June's 'mind style'.²⁴⁴ She has heightened observational skills, and is hypervigilant about her surroundings, therefore, noticing signs, labels, colours, etc.:

When I open them I see the boy beside me still licking his ice-cream, his mother who is looking intently at her phone screen, a man holding a big mint green storage bag

²⁴¹ Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, 86.

²⁴² Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 43.

²⁴³ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 190.

²⁴⁴ Roger Fowler, *Linguistics and the Novel* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1977): ix.

with the word **DELIVEROO** on it, and then there's the man who has been helping me find Notting Hill.²⁴⁵

I also wanted the novel to connect more with the city setting to “generate a kind of graphic white noise that defines the culture of this novel”²⁴⁶ with regard to shop signs, street names and brand labels, presented in the same or a similar font style and colour as which a person would see them on the street (Harrods, Deliveroo, Underground, etc.). I wanted June to be bombarded with everyday London signage to further strengthen the urban setting and the culture within it.

Galloway's novel uses italics to reflect gaps in time and to highlight the flashback sequences of when she witnessed her partner's drowning. The italics is scattered between real-time events to emphasise that Joy is reliving that same day over and over again, the outcome always being the same: “*His mouth is a red O, eyes wide to the sky.*”²⁴⁷

“Many narrative texts employ flashback...to fill in the past history of protagonists while avoiding a lengthy introduction or in order to reveal new facts”, and to add separation between “memory of past events within the main narrative” and “the reader's own memory of those events.”²⁴⁸ Quite often these flashbacks are italicised, as illustrated in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing* and in my own creative work, *June in the Garden*. The italicised flashbacks are used to convey the same meaning as Joy's flashbacks in Galloway's novel — to highlight that June too is replaying fragments from that fateful day, doomed to relive it through her own memories of her mother which are rooted in trauma and loss: “*Swirling, murky, dark water sloshing around, long reeds caught in the pull, floating, knotting...*”²⁴⁹ We learn later that the long reeds floating and

²⁴⁵ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 56.

²⁴⁶ Sadokierski, “Disturbing the text: typographic devices in literary fiction.”

²⁴⁷ Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 40.

²⁴⁸ Teresa Bridgeman, “Time and Space,” 57.

²⁴⁹ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 235.

knotting are in fact the strands of her mother's hair in the water as she drifts further down stream, away from June who stands on the riverbank watching her.

This notion of detachment and observation is also reflected in Galloway's text with the addition of "ooo"²⁵⁰ in several places as paragraph breaks or chapter headings, which could signify a lengthy or exaggerated 'O' for 'Observer'. Perhaps the three O's are a shadow of the former Joy, "whose name contains two 'o's" and who has now "become a third and absent person to herself, a circle containing only white space."²⁵¹ The 'ooo' could also be a reminder of the "red O"²⁵² on her deceased partner's face or it could be numbers and not letters, with the zeros representing Joy's emptiness and nonexistence in her own narrative — "I didn't exist."²⁵³ Detachment is such a central theme to Galloway's novel. The character of Joy exists outside of the story, trapped between two worlds: the traumatic past and the isolated present.

Lists and Inventories

Other elements of typography include lists and inventories, which some of the mentioned authors have employed in their own fictional narratives, including Janice Galloway and Mark Haddon.

In *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, Joy is a person who acknowledges: "I make a lot of lists."²⁵⁴ Perhaps she needs to structure her day to feel control, something she's lost since the death of her lover. Following lists, including ones from a magazine, a TV advertisement and suggestions from a friend, allows Joy to continue to emotionally separate herself from life, to avoid processing the trauma. The lists represent her alienation from society. Inventories and lists give her options and purpose, however temporary and false that may be:

²⁵⁰ Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 57, 70, 72, 76, 77.

²⁵¹ Cairns Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2002): 195.

²⁵² Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 40.

²⁵³ Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 79.

²⁵⁴ Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 40.

THINGS YOU CAN DO IN THE EVENING

listen to the radio

watch TV

have a bath²⁵⁵

Without lists, Joy would be left to decide upon her own actions, which to her is terrifying and confusing at this time of mourning.

Haddon employs typographical devices in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, in fact “the use of pictures, diagrams and mathematical equations forms an integral part of the narrative.”²⁵⁶ The visuals he utilises also include lists to show Christopher’s heightened sense of detail and need for order:

This what I had in my pockets

1. A Swiss Army knife with 13 attachments including a wire stripper and a saw and a toothpick and tweezers
2. A piece of string
3. A piece of a wooden puzzle which looked like this²⁵⁷

Lists can often relate to rules, routines and expectations, and therefore was a preferred visual for my own creative work. I wanted this to be a relatively new cognitive strategy for June, one passed on to her by her late mother and social worker — mapping out her options for new and unfamiliar situations:

²⁵⁵ Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 37.

²⁵⁶ Allen, *London Fiction at the Millennium*, 96.

²⁵⁷ Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, 13.

As it's only 7:25PM I am not quite ready for sleep so I contemplate my options to pass the remaining two hours:

1. Stare out the window at the countryside beyond Edinburgh City.
2. Doodle florals and vines on the napkins that the previous person has left on the side table.
3. Read, which I can do as I have 2 books packed with me.
4. Go for a walk and explore the train as it may be my last time on one if I am to live in London with the Wilsons.²⁵⁸

June also uses lists when assessing costs, profits and generally to keep track of her finances, because that's what her mother taught her in the event she ever needed to manage her own funds, which happens when her mother dies and June leaves for London.

1 foldable yoga mat in forest green... £4.99

1 plain white pillow... £7.99

1 lamp with tassels on the shade... £12.99

1 rug (striped, again with tassels)... £10.99

1 slim bedside table in white oak... £15.99

Estimated total..... £50 ish²⁵⁹

In *The Rosie Project*, like June, Don regularly makes lists to help him with decisions before beginning a course of action, usually when his routine has been disturbed for some reason, or to

²⁵⁸ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 38.

²⁵⁹ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 129.

outline the advantages of some of his ‘life rules’, including implementing a “Standardized Meal System”:²⁶⁰

1. No need to accumulate recipes books.
2. Standard shopping list - hence very efficient shopping.
3. Almost zero waste - nothing in the refrigerator or pantry unless required for one of the recipes.
4. Diet planned and nutritionally balanced in advance.
5. No time wasted wondering what to cook.
6. No mistakes, no unpleasant surprises.
7. Excellent food, superior to most restaurants at a much lower price (see point 3).
8. Minimal cognitive load required.²⁶¹

Lists feature several times in *The Rosie Project* to highlight Don’s need for control and predictability, whilst in Hall’s *The Raw Shark Texts*, lists serve to ground the main character and provide stability as he desperately tries to untangle a web of psychological trauma. Although the character of Eric Sanderson is different to some of the other protagonists like Ove (Backman, 2014), Christopher (Haddon, 2003), Don (Simsion, 2013) and my own, he does still exhibit a neurodiverse character profile in terms of presenting with social-emotional detachment. Moreover, like the other characters discussed, he also makes lists to aid in his mental processing, reasoning and decision-making:

²⁶⁰ Simsion, *The Rosie Project*, 62.

²⁶¹ Simsion, *The Rosie Project*, 63.

I ate my breakfast in front of the still-chattering TV and made a mental list of the things I wanted to find in the house. The list went like this:

- Address book to contact family/friends and tell them what had happened.
- Photographs/photograph album. I needed to see my past life. I needed to see a picture of me with the girl who died in Greece.
- I remembered there had been a locked door upstairs, next to the bedroom I'd woken up in. I'd find the key to the door and what was so important that it had to be locked away *inside* the house.²⁶²

There are also letters, communications from his previous self, the “First Eric Sanderson”²⁶³ and frequent chapter breaks to drip feed the narrative to the reader and to compellingly convey a sense of fragmentation and detachment. This is further strengthened by Hall’s word choice. The word ‘fragment’ is peppered into the narrative around fifty times, at a rough count. Similar words also feature, such as “fractures”, “isolation”, “empty”, “ambiguity” and “deterioration”²⁶⁴ to depict Eric’s emotional detachment. Whilst “parameters” and “boundaries”²⁶⁵ convey his desire for control and stability, much like the other characters mentioned in this section.

Formulas, Signs and Symbols

Other than lists, Haddon adds other typographical devices in *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, many of them mathematically-based. For example, Christopher’s chapters are titled with prime numbers, not with cardinal numbers, giving a reader insight into his atypical thinking patterns:

²⁶² Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*, 19.

²⁶³ Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*, 111.

²⁶⁴ Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*, 23, 28, 30, 75, 143.

²⁶⁵ Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*, 29, 30.

I have decided to give my chapters prime numbers **2, 3, 5, 7, 11, 13** and so on because I like prime numbers.²⁶⁶

Christopher then goes on to demonstrate how prime numbers are determined using a number grid and a formula. This is one of the many grids, graphs and mathematical formulas that a reader can find in Haddon's novel. Other visual representations of Christopher's acute observational skills include images of t-shirt logos, maps, photographs, and street or building plans.²⁶⁷ His sense of detail and his desire to make readers also value detail is highlighted with the use of footnotes and flowcharts with predicted outcomes for various scenarios.²⁶⁸

Additionally, Haddon utilises the 'faces' technique on pages two and three, a common strategy for teaching basic emotions to a child with social and emotional differences in special education classrooms, a type of typography I use in my own creative work.

I include shop signs and brand logos to explain the processing patterns of June and also to emphasise the newness of her surroundings, a factor greatly affecting her social and emotional behaviours. June is outside of her comfort zone in London, and is therefore, hyperaware of everything around her — the buildings, people, accents, shop windows, street signs, etc.

I had asked a woman in a ridiculously-overpriced coffee shop to direct me to the best shop in London to pick out a gift for a maximum of £10 for the man I recently discovered is my biological father. She has sent me to a place called:²⁶⁹



²⁶⁶ Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, 11.

²⁶⁷ Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, 36, 87, 88, 144.

²⁶⁸ Haddon, *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, 5, 65.

²⁶⁹ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 194.

This is used throughout the novel to highlight June’s observational skills and sense of awareness to her surroundings:

I can’t continue sleeping on the floor on some tarp and a hotel blanket.

So here I am to make some basic alterations:²⁷⁰



Like June, Joy in Galloway's text is a person who presents with social-emotional detachment. The numerous typographical devices employed, including footnotes, magazine headings and titles such as “This is the Way Things Are”,²⁷¹ convey a person desperately trying to write her own narrative. Joy plays many characters in her own story — she is a mistress, teacher, friend, sister, daughter, patient, victim and once was a “good wife.”²⁷² But after the trauma, and the aftermath, she is cast out from society, alienated and taken advantage of, and even dismissed by the many doctors and healthcare visitors she encounters while grieving for her deceased lover.

How Galloway redesigns our understanding of narrative form does more than draw “our attention to the ‘consciously constructed’ book in our hands”, she illustrates that “these devices form a unique typographic ‘language’ that we learn to comprehend as we engage with the novel.”²⁷³ Galloway shows us that trauma, detachment and — as a consequence — atypical existence, can be shown in other ways than standard text. Neurodiversity is sometimes best illustrated *visually*.

²⁷⁰ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 128.

²⁷¹ Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 26.

²⁷² Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 41.

²⁷³ Sadokierski, “Disturbing the text: typographic devices in literary fiction.”

Scripts and Staging

As we engage more with the text, we realise the narrative devices Janice Galloway employs, such as scripted interactions with the numerous visitors that come and go, are there to further remove Joy from her life, placing her in this ‘otherworld’ where she is separated from the community, and from her emotions:

HEALTH VISITOR	[Intensifying] But what about the day-to-day? How are you coping?
PATIENT	OK. [Brave smile] I manage. ²⁷⁴

In this particular scene, Joy plays the role of Patient, as she does in other scripted dialogues with the various psychiatrists she encounters while placed in treatment. The format of her conversations reinforce a sense of physical and emotional detachment for both Joy and the reader. Another example of a script appears during the memorial; the words in the reverend’s speech are capitalised and off to the left of the page, with a commentary on the right. This comes before a list organising her interpretations of the hidden message, that she is “the stain” that needs to be “cleansed, absolved, got rid of”²⁷⁵ with regard to her affair with her married work colleague:

THIS SERVICE HAS BEEN ONE OF	
JOY AND CELEBRATION AS	I notice he rolled his eyes
WELL AS SORROW	unpleasantly ²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 21.

²⁷⁵ Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 79.

²⁷⁶ Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 78.

The displaced text represents a displaced Joy, “sentencing her to a life without continuity” where she “has been written out of the script.”²⁷⁷ I employ a similar device in my own creative work, to serve the same purpose:

SOCIAL WORKER: (Sighs loudly) June, I’m so sorry for your loss.

JUNE: (Pauses) Okay.

SOCIAL WORKER: I talked with the police again yesterday. The autopsy doesn’t show any drugs in your mother’s system—

JUNE: (Interrupts) Mother doesn’t take drugs. Not anymore.²⁷⁸

The script-like sections reveal June’s inability to navigate this unfamiliar world, post-Mother. Just as Joy describes herself as “indecipherable”,²⁷⁹ June also feels the same, further illustrating this ‘otherworld’²⁸⁰ she now exists in like Joy.

Scripting is also a common technique used when working with students with neurodiverse thinking patterns and the inclusion of it in *June in the Garden* highlights its importance. Fern Brady agrees in her memoir that for individuals with social-emotional disorders, “Scripting is crucial” to avoid the “impossible social calculations”, because when “you have no social intuition, you can use scripts to interact more effectively.”²⁸¹ Whilst Brady is referring to her own diagnosis of ASD, this statement is also true for those with RAD.

²⁷⁷ Craig, *The Modern Scottish Novel*, 193.

²⁷⁸ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 12.

²⁷⁹ Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 37.

²⁸⁰ Cairns Craig, “Otherworlds,” 270.

²⁸¹ Fern Brady, *Strong Female Character* (London: Hachette, 2023), 47

Marginalia and Graphics

This concept of ‘otherworlds’²⁸² existing outside of the main narrative is one present in Steven Hall’s *The Raw Shark Texts*, with graphics of a conceptual shark, a “powerful and persistent mnemonic predator” that hunts the character of Eric Sanderson, sending him into a state of “*otherness*” and “black space”, temporarily hidden by “Dictaphone fragments” and “a smokescreen of codes and texts.”²⁸³ The world Eric exists in is physically restrictive, much like June’s world in the shed, consisting only of “tunnels”, “shafts”, and “crawlspac.”²⁸⁴ An afterword by the author confirms this ‘otherness’, informing his reader that, “For every chapter bound into this book, there is an un-chapter, a negative, existing somewhere beyond its covers.”²⁸⁵ This comes after the author’s acknowledgements, several pages after the reader has perceived the narrative to have concluded.

The idea of ‘otherness’ that Hall presents is further exemplified in my own creative work with the various housing structures on the chapter title pages, both a representation of June’s reactive attachment disorder and a vehicle for driving her objective in the narrative: to create a home for herself. The vines inked up the sides of the first page of every new chapter serve as walls creating that home, as temporary as it may be at that time.

The opening chapter of *June in the Garden* shows remnants of what once was June’s home in Glasgow, an outline of a house on a street, with the neighbour’s home in the background to indicate that June belonged to a community, a safe haven where she knew all the neighbours. The next chapter shows a house sitting alone, starting the reduction of the visuals, and the boundaries that held her securely within the emotional shelter of her mother. Her mother was her world, and she helped June stay on track by keeping everything predictable and easy to comprehend. After her

²⁸² Cairns Craig, “Otherworlds,” 270.

²⁸³ Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*, 266, 116, 227, 179, 283.

²⁸⁴ Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*, 216, 216, 225.

²⁸⁵ Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*, 440.

death, these walls are taken down, with only fragments remaining of what was once there. When June departs for London on the train, leaving behind Scotland and her home, the chapter pages are blank, void of security, structure and predictability.

In Hall's *The Raw Shark Texts*, pages 330 to 338 are blank, empty of words and visuals, as Eric falls into the conceptual ocean and the word shark approaches, finally coming into typographical form on page 339. The “flipbook device” of this typographical element makes this scene “a cinematic allusion, in a cinematic way.”²⁸⁶

Similarly, in *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, one page is completely blank with only the word “oops”.²⁸⁷ A blankness sandwiched between an emotional episode at the treatment facility where Joy requires medication to calm down and a birthday sequence where she is stoically unwrapping presents from pink tissue. Like in *June in the Garden*, there is a sense of loss conveyed by employing this typographical device, replacing any continuity and familiarity with fragments of a disrupted life, again highlighting an existence outside of the story.

Aside from basic roof structures when she visits her father and goes to the hotel, we don't see the regrowth of visual walls in *June in the Garden* until June is in the shed. Over the course of the summer, the main timeframe of her story, we see the slow rebuilding of walls, but this time created with vines to represent the shed, the garden where she is living, and her fascination with horticulture. These vines will grow but never meet at the top. A roof will never be constructed because that is the final piece to her journey. Her creation of a home will never be complete until her biological father accepts her.

²⁸⁶ Sadokierski, “Disturbing the text: typographic devices in literary fiction.”

²⁸⁷ Galloway, *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*, 188.

Flashbacks, including the chapter titled “June and the Return of Mother”,²⁸⁸ cause a momentary removal of the vines to convey a sense of loss, emptiness and isolation, with sometimes only a few flowers on the ground remaining.

More blooms stem from June’s increased interactions with her biological father. From the chapter titled “June and the Lobster Croquettes”,²⁸⁹ small handpicked flowers begin to grow from the ground, to represent another step forward, another layer to the reconstruction of June’s identity, to the formation of stability and boundaries, and a step towards rebuilding a secure emotional attachment to a caregiver. And as the chapters progress, particularly around “June and the Red Rose”²⁹⁰ when her relationship with her half-brother is tested, as they argue over the last of the cheese for their lunch, the vines and flowers begin to grow wilder, taking up more visual space on the page as June’s emotions become heightened and affected by her interactions with her half-brother. The chapter after the flashback where the circumstances surrounding her mother’s death are finally revealed to the reader, the title page becomes saturated with garden growth, much like the saturated pages in Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Hall’s *The Raw Shark Texts*.

The discovery of her in the shed by her father in a later chapter again causes the removal of these walls, her temporary home, and when she is forced to sleep on a park bench the title page that precedes is again predominantly blank, void of the vine walls and of the stability and boundaries she craves, but with the occasional cluster of flowers growing from the ground without a foundation. By the end, when she is reunited with her father and also with her mother through her final letter, the vines finally meet the straight angular lines of a rooftop, delicately framing her final chapter to symbolise an end to a summer spent living in a shed, and also to represent a meeting of

²⁸⁸ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 180.

²⁸⁹ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 262.

²⁹⁰ Liebnitz, *June in the Garden*, 283.

two very different households and backgrounds, to show growth and a blossoming relationship with her father, half-brother and stepmother.

Visually, I wanted to show some artistic variation and, narratively, a small degree of a freeing of June's emotional boundaries and restrictions, therefore the configuration of the vine walls changes slightly with every growth and every new chapter, rather than adhering to one particular design. The vines that build the shed are also perhaps a character in itself, much like Steven Hall's conceptual shark in his novel, growing alongside and around June as the narrative form grows around Eric, eventually constructing the 'Ludovician'. The form changes and grows as June attempts to understand and interact with the world around her, never fully processing the notion of impermanence, with the threat of change being so imminent.

Narrating June's story through certain typographical elements emphasises her own neurodiverse way of interacting with the world, a way that is both visual and emotionally-detached. These "typographic elements do not alter the meaning of the text itself"²⁹¹ but highlight the representation of character within the text. Without these typographical elements, *June in the Garden* would still fundamentally convey the same meaning, but with them the representation of RAD and, more generally, of social-emotional detachment, is considerably strengthened.

CONCLUSION

Disorganised, disinhibited and detached all apply to the medical term reactive attachment disorder (RAD), a diagnosis that greatly affects an individual's emotional attachment patterns and ability to socially engage with others. This can result in neurodiverse thinking patterns and atypical social behaviours, commonly associated with some heterogeneous characters in contemporary fiction, particularly the ones discussed in this thesis. This understanding of heterogeneity is explored in the creative work using common threads often found in similar texts that feature a neurodiverse

²⁹¹ Sadokierski, "Disturbing the text: typographic devices in literary fiction."

protagonist, including: social language difficulties, a restricted setting, a heightened awareness to detail and time, a loss of identity, and more significantly, through an element of typography and design. Literature featuring a neurodiverse character with suspected ASD has been included in my research because (1) there is a discrepancy in RAD narratives, leaving a gap in the commercial market; and (2) “emotionally withdrawn symptoms of RAD” can be “hard to discriminate from the emotionally withdrawal found in ASD”.²⁹²

This research project identified particular themes and patterns common in novels featuring a heterogeneous protagonist, specifically those associated with the representation of social-emotional detachment. However, it is my hope that *June in the Garden* has proposed a new way to represent social-emotional detachment and neurodiverse thinking patterns; a way that reframes the presentation of a disability like RAD, where the character’s objective is woven into the typography itself and not necessarily just spilling out of the main text like many of the novels discussed here. The chapter pages are a manifestation of June’s goal, which is to find a more stable home. In addition, I hope to raise awareness on the existence of reactive attachment disorder and other forms of social disengagement disorders, and that it will highlight the lack of representation of RAD in clinical research and commercial fiction. Perhaps it will initiate a wider discussion on whether it is the individual’s “failure to adapt to the social world, or the social world that has failed to provide her with adequate resources to sustain her existence”,²⁹³ an important argument to consider after the suicide of June’s mother, and one present in Galloway’s novel *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*.

Hopefully this piece of research will carve a space for itself in the field of creative writing, and that further academic discourse will continue to take place after this, particularly on the prevalence of RAD in communities and the absence of it in contemporary fiction. It is of my opinion that this research has achieved its goal of depicting an adult protagonist with RAD, using

²⁹² Minnis et al, “Autism and Attachment Disorders — How Do We Tell The Difference?” 375.

²⁹³ Thomson, “Alienation and community in contemporary Scottish fiction: The case of Janice Galloway’s *The Trick is to Keep Breathing*,” 169.

the childhood traits associated with the disorder to construct an adult identity, one that is fractured and ambivalent. If commercially published, this novel could narrow the gap between homogeneous fiction and heterogeneous fiction, specifically stories that address social-emotional detachment issues outside of “autism narratives.”²⁹⁴ Moreover, if published, *June in the Garden* may become the first piece of RAD fiction on the market, an accomplishment that Dr Helen Minnis, renowned RAD expert at the University of Glasgow, said she would most welcome due to the lack of current representation.²⁹⁵

This critical exegesis highlighted two primary avenues for depicting social-emotional detachment in fiction: (1) heterogeneous narration and (2) an application of typography and/or visual arrangement of text. The typography employed seeks “to create verisimilitude – a believable world for readers to enter” and “strives to support the author’s verisimilitude” because “well-executed typography allows readers to slip into the world of the book, unimpeded by the activity of reading.”²⁹⁶ Typography can sometimes be embedded into the narrative, much like *The Raw Shark Texts* where Steven Hall directly refers to the “complicated visual arrangements” in his novel, and even attaching one secondary character, Dr Fidorous, to “The Bureau of Language and Typography”.²⁹⁷ This may be because Steven Hall “started out as an artist” and wanted to write a piece of fiction that explores “ideas about language and the evolution of ideas and language in a visual sense”,²⁹⁸ which he accomplished.

Like many of the novels discussed, the visuals in *June in the Garden* help to construct the storyworld, not distract a reader from it. It is for this reason that I employed typographical devices with caution, and not in a way that frequently disturbs the text and constantly rearranges and

²⁹⁴ Barker and Murray, “On Reading Disability and Literature,” 7.

²⁹⁵ Helen Minnis, personal email communications, February 2022.

²⁹⁶ Sadokierski, “Disturbing the text: typographic devices in literary fiction.”

²⁹⁷ Hall, *Raw Shark Texts*, 227, 278

²⁹⁸ Structo Magazine, “Interview with Steven Hall,” accessed 2 February, 2021, <https://structomagazine.co.uk/interviews/steven-hall/>

redesigns the written narrative, much like Danielewski's *House of Leaves* (2000), which is why I did not include his work in this critical exegesis when discussing typography and narrative form.

The fictional texts I did discuss, along with my own, use typographical devices: (1) to be a representation of social-emotional detachment, particularly RAD, becoming a personification of June and her overall loss of identity caused by the death of her mother and the upheaval of her predictable and routinised life in Scotland; and (2) to visually represent June's overall objective to find stability and a home.

Lastly, I hope this research encourages more academic discourse on what classes as neurodiverse or heterogeneous behaviours, or more specifically for this thesis, what classes as emotionally-detached behaviours? To whom are we comparing these neurodiverse characters? Perhaps instead of representing a disorder or a disability, *June in the Garden* challenges "the very terms of normalcy that circumscribe disability" and disputes "dominant notions of what it means to be disabled."²⁹⁹ Perhaps these characters are "extraordinarily abled, here" because they have "access to information that "normal" people cannot access."³⁰⁰

When reflecting upon the use of typographical devices in *June in the Garden*, I considered whether it would come across as 'gimmicky' or distracting, or perhaps even inauthentic or forced. However, an interview from Jonathan Safran Foer after the release of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* resonated with me: "It's a shame that people consider the use of images in a novel to be experimental or brave. No one would say that the use of type in a painting is experimental or brave. Literature has been more protective of its borders than any other art form – too protective."³⁰¹ My creative choices for my novel do not come from a place of ambition, for I too do not consider novels that employ typographical devices as ambitious or brave. Anything deemed unconventional

²⁹⁹ Sarah Jaquette Ray, "Normalcy, Knowledge, and Nature in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*," in *Disability Studies Journal* 33, no. 3 (2013): 8.

³⁰⁰ Ray, "Normalcy, Knowledge, and Nature in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*," 5.

³⁰¹ Gabe Hudson, "Everything is interrogated," in *The Village Voice*, accessed March 2022, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2005/03/22/everything-is-interrogated/>

when compared to the standard print form has the potential to further a representation, an emotional journey, or to construct a separate world for the character to exist in, like Lanny or Joy Stone. We can't be protective of the conventional narrative form because story conventions and forms are constantly changing. Furthermore, "Literary disability studies is rapidly diversifying in terms of its reach across literatures",³⁰² these types of "Disability narratives never stand alone, but interweave around and through other codes and contexts for writing."³⁰³ In *June in the Garden*, the representation of RAD is intrinsically connected to the representation of family, trauma and the complex mother-daughter dyad. Therefore, June's narrative could never have been told without the characteristics of a social-emotional detachment disorder figuratively and physically spreading across the page, as her identity and sense of self is so inherently entangled with her neurodiversity. June sees the world in flowers, bloom and growth, and interacts with it and those within it in a manner that is both simple and contained, but also complicated and free. She is woven into the fabrics of the page, particularly the chapter pages. Each part of her story represents her taking a step forward, or sometimes back, and even though the final part, the roof, is added to the last chapter, her story continues on, as does her struggle with RAD.

³⁰² Claire Barker and Stuart Murray, "On Reading Disability and Literature," in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Disability* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 6.

³⁰³ Barker; Murray. *On Reading Disability and Literature*, 7.

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