

Unsettling the Norm: A Posthumanist Reading of Sameness and Differences in Kathryn Erskine's *Mockingbird*

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Abstract—Drawing on a posthumanist theory, this paper tackles the voices of children with intellectual disability in Erskine's *Mockingbird* (2010). Posthumanism conflicts with the principles of humanism that ground discrimination against the disabled in the first place. So, it sheds light on the participation and inclusion of the disabled in society. Hence, posthumanism aims to focus on self and others, raising awareness among children with and without disabilities about sameness and differences. Finding sameness helps the non-disabled understand the experience of others and creates a sense of shared humanity whereas revealing differences allows them to question social constructions related to disability. Accordingly, the paper seeks to explore how Erskine echoes the voices of the autistic. Moreover, the paper displays the social, attitudinal, and environmental barriers that hinder the participation of the autistic in society and the educational system on an equal footing with non-disabled children, challenging the misconceptions and stereotypes relating to the autistic. Adopting an analytical approach, the study displays how Erskine amplifies the voices of the autistic to enable the non-disabled to understand the suffering, experiences, beliefs, and points of view of the former.

Index Terms—difference, the disabled people, *Mockingbird*, posthumanism, sameness

I. INTRODUCTION

First of all, humanists define themselves in terms of ability. They pay attention to biological wholeness/perfection. As Braidotti (2013) explains, human norm “stands for normality, normalcy, and normativity” (p. 26). Similarly, Smart (2001) defines normal as “the absence of deviance, illness, or disability” (p. 3). This definition clearly excludes people with disabilities because they are viewed as abnormal. Smart elaborates that three elements are related to the determination of normalcy: “(p. 1) the characteristic(s) to be judged, (p. 2) the environment in which the characteristic(s) appear(s), and (p. 3) the individual(s) who are making the judgment” (p. 4). As observed, people who do not reach certain levels of abilities are targeted for negative practices. This means that normalization is related to a fully human being. In the humanist framework, disabled people are excluded because they are seen as sub-humans.

In response to these exclusionary ideologies, posthumanism emerges to end the dehumanization of people with disabilities, challenging the misconceptions relating to disability. More specifically, it is a broad term that is difficult to define. Wolfe (2009) states: “[P]osthumanism [...] generates different and even irreconcilable definitions” (p. xi). Hence, there is no definite definition of posthumanism. Agreeing with Wolfe, Hassan (1977) points out: “We need to understand that five hundred years of humanism may be coming to an end, as humanism transforms itself into something that we must helplessly call posthumanism” (p. 843).

Within posthumanism, the question of ‘Who is considered a human being?’ has been discussed. Goodley et al. (2014) affirm: “Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that.

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Some of us are not even considered fully human now” (pp. 342–43). Thus, the previous question is answered in a way that excludes many marginalized people. So, posthumanism is concerned with the disabled who are excluded from human status. Braidotti (2016) asserts: “Becoming posthuman [...] is a process of redefining one’s sense of attachment and connection to a shared world” (p. 115). As seen, posthumanism helps the non-disabled shed their humanity and asks them to become an integral part of a relational regime with the disabled.

In line with this relational view, posthumanism emphasizes the interconnection between the disabled and the non-disabled. Buber (2008) introduces the notion of “the inter-human” and describes this notion as an “*I-Thou*” relation. For Buber, in an “I”-“you” relationship, people can be truly human. Buber says: “I become through my relation to the *Thou* [you]; as I become *I*. I say *Thou*. All real living is meeting” (p. 11). As seen, Buber means that humans are capable of integration if they change the way they think to value and integrate different others. For this purpose, posthumanism focuses on the self and others.

Parallel to these theoretical developments, the past decade has witnessed the emergence of a new literary domain—disabled literature—which seeks to give voice to the disabled and address systemic barriers through collective narratives. This literature reflects not only individual authors’ perspectives but also the broader philosophies and lived experiences of disabled communities. It also represents disabled people’s call for equality and participation in society.

In this vein, the main aim of children’s texts is to examine how children explore the issues of disability, frame the opinions of children regarding disability, and help children uncover negative images and stereotypes relating to disability. According to Adomat (2014), “Children’s literature can be instrumental in changing readers’ attitudes about stereotypes, it is important for educators [...] to build bridges, not reinforce prejudices” (para. 7). As mentioned, children’s texts create change in attitudes about disability.

Consequently, the writers of children’s texts aim to make non-disabled children build a positive understanding of disabled children. Adomat (2014) adds: “Children with and without disabilities developed compassion and understanding for one another” (para. 41). She continues: “Through exploring characters in books, children not only learned about various disabilities, but they came to understand characters with disabilities as full and complex beings, similar in many ways to themselves” (para. 41). Furthermore, she observes: “The children with disabilities in [...] classrooms recognized and appreciated that children like themselves were represented, and therefore valued, in literature” (para. 50). As stated, children’s texts help children with and without disabilities understand one another and learn about sameness and differences.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many studies about Erskine’s *Mockingbird*. For example, a study like “Erskine’s *Mockingbird* Approached Via Semino’s Mindstyle” (2016), by Mihăilescu, concentrates on “[Elena] Semino’s mind style and [Paul] Grice’s theory of the maxims of quantity and relation will be turned into account in order to reveal how through the processing of linguistic and psychological patterns positive effects of communication and successful human relationship will be accomplished” (p. 105). In addition, Rahmani, in the study “The Search for Personal Identity in Kathryn Erskine’s *Mockingbird*” (2017), sheds light on the problems of personal identity experienced by teenagers. Moreover, the purpose of the study is to describe the personality of the main character in the novel and present her identity problems. In addition, a study like “An Illocutionary Acts Misunderstood by Caitlin in *Mockingbird*” (2018), by Anggraeny, aims “to classify illocutionary act based on [John] Searle’s theory [Speech Act Theory] and analyze their function by using [Geoffrey] Leech’s theory [the Grand theory]” (p. v). Moreover, this study applies a pragmatic approach to show how the main character uses a sentence/phrase to express her attitude. Finally, Asri et al., in their paper “Changes in the Life of The Main Character in Kathryn Erskine’s *Mockingbird*” (2020), focus on the changes that the main character experiences and the difficulties she faces in life.

It is observed that the previous studies discuss the novel from the medical and linguistics point of view by applying Grice’s, Searle’s, and Leech’s theories. In doing so, the perspective of the current study explores how Erskine displays the voice of a child with autism from a posthumanist perspective, turning attention away from the medical model of disability to the organization of society. Thus, the main aim of this study is to show how the autistics are portrayed by focusing on their inclusion in society and the educational system.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research takes a qualitative interpretive stance that draws on the foundations of posthumanist critical theory. Identifying the dynamic and fluid nature of identity, difference, and disability (Braidotti, 2021), the study takes on critical textual analysis in examining Kathryn Erskine’s *Mockingbird* (2010) through a posthumanist analysis. The research examines the narrative techniques employed by Erskine to represent the life of an autistic child in an ableist-dominated world. Provocations to the novel’s engagement with posthumanist questions like relational subjectivity, unsettling normative humanism, and reconceptualizing personhood on a new set of cognitive and somatic criteria (Wolfe, 2012). The research emphasizes the interrelated nature of disability, social context, and institutional structures, and in particular, how society’s understanding of autism influences individuals’ experiences.

The core tenets of the critical posthumanist approach are supported by insights emanating from Posthuman Disability

Studies, which emphasize the flexibility of identity, relationality between human and non-human actors, and the ethical imperative of rethinking inclusion outside conventional humanist norms.

The study specifically applies:

- An analysis of first-person narrative, symbolic imagery, and "sameness" and "difference" via narrative analysis. Thematic analysis serves to uncover recurring themes that illuminate systemic obstacles, social marginalization, and instances of empowerment.

- A critical contextualization to situate the novel within broader socio-cultural discussions of disability, education, and social integration.

- A holistic qualitative methodology in an attempt to demonstrate that *Mockingbird* presents a posthumanist perspective which argues for a more expansive model of humanity, one that positions the importance of neurodiversity at the forefront and provokes a destabilization of disability marginalization.

IV. DISCUSSION

Mockingbird (2010) is based on the novelist's personal experience as she has a daughter with Asperger's Syndrome. *Mockingbird* narrates the story of a ten-year-old girl who finds it difficult to communicate with others, especially after the death of her elder brother, Devon. Devon is killed in a school shooting. Caitlin is devastated when her brother is shot to death. *Mockingbird* also illustrates how Caitlin struggles to cope with Asperger's Syndrome, and how she makes efforts to realize developments and changes in her personality.

Hence, Erskine writes *Mockingbird* to dig deeper into Caitlin's personality and make the reader(s) find out more about Asperger's Syndrome. Moreover, she intends to reveal the struggles that the protagonist faces because of autism. The novel displays how she can find a way to overcome her suffering. *Mockingbird* discusses the significance of social interaction between the disabled and the non-disabled. Erskine exhibits the importance of including a person with disability in the classroom and society, and how communication between non-disabled and disabled students can bridge the gap between them. Therefore, the inclusion of the disabled in society and schooling is the focal point of posthumanism. According to Erskine (2010), the main purpose of writing this novel is the "hope that we all might understand each other better" (p. 9). This reflects that the main problem that the autistic face is that the non-disabled cannot understand them.

Mockingbird is written from the first-person point of view of a child with Asperger's Syndrome, allowing the protagonist to speak for herself. According to Stela (2021), "autistic children's mental structures could be easily tackled through the first-point of view [...] because it facilitates the access to the main character's inaccessible consciousness due to [his/her] suffering from autism" (p. 11). Erskine uses first-person narration to make the reader(s) see the world through the eyes of an autistic child and experience the representation of Asperger's Syndrome by living in Caitlin's position. On this basis, Erskine uses the first-person point of view to share a personal story with the reader(s). In an interview with Corbett (2010), Erskine states that "[her daughter] has read [*Mockingbird*] [...] and she feels it's pretty accurate of the way she sees the world. She's very excited to have a book about someone like her" (para. 5). Moreover, Erskine points out that this novel helps her daughter like "the idea of being different" (para. 5). Equally important, posthumanism emphasizes the representation of the voices of the disabled in literature to be understood by others.

To go deeper into the features of Asperger's Syndrome, it is significant to shed light on autism in the first place. Autism is an umbrella characterization that includes Asperger's Syndrome. Autism has an impact on how information is comprehended and stored in the brain. A person with autism has difficulty with social interactions, verbal and non-verbal communication, and other activities. Frith (1991) defines autism as "a developmental disorder [...]. Its core features, present in different forms, at all stages of development and at all levels of ability, are impairments in socialization, communication, and imagination" (p. 2).

A person with Asperger's Syndrome has difficulty making friends, unable to understand what is said, or recognize other people's feelings or rules of social behavior. Baron-Cohen (2008) states: "Autism and Asperger's syndrome both share three core diagnostic features: difficulties in social development, and in the development of communication, alongside unusually strong, narrow interests and repetitive behavior" (p. 112).

To put it simply, Asperger's Syndrome affects the Theory of Mind (ToM). Ruhl (2023) defines ToM as "the ability to attribute mental states to oneself and others, understanding that others have beliefs, desires, intentions, and perspectives that are different from one's own" (para. 1). Hence, ToM enables a person to participate in social interaction. This reveals that social codes are difficult to access for people with Asperger's Syndrome.

For this purpose, a person with autism is known to be mentally blind. He/She cannot understand the minds of others. According to Wijn (2020), a person with autism is called blind-minded because of "the inability to mentalize. [...] [He/She does not] really know what the other means or is planning to do [...]. [M]ind blindness is caused by the inability to theorize about mental states or the inability to simulate others" (p. 5). As seen above, mindblindness occurs because of the inability to understand others.

It is worth noting that Devon, Caitlin's brother, plays a major role in helping her adapt to her intellectual disability. As a result, Caitlin struggles to face the external world after his death. Devon teaches her to respond socially in an acceptable way. Caitlin has trouble communicating with her father who cannot surpass his sadness. Caitlin says: "I wish Dad would just tell me things. It would make life a lot easier" (p. 89). This reflects how he cannot deal with her. As a result, her brother has been her conduit to the external world and helps her as a social guide.

Concerning their relationship, Caitlin and Devon spend their quality time watching movies on TV. For example, they watch the movie *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a novel written by Harper Lee in 1960 and made into a movie. *To Kill a Mockingbird* is narrated through the eyes of the two siblings: a brother (Jem) and a sister (Scout). It tells a story of an innocent black man who is accused of raping a white woman. According to White (2021), *To Kill a Mockingbird* focuses on the theme that “evil does often win out, especially when it grows out of ignorance, racism, fear, and hatred for people who are different” (para. 2). Hence, Erskine confirms that the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* inspires her to write *Mockingbird* because “Devon is like Jem [...] [and] [Caitlin] look[s] a little like Scout [...] [and] Devon would take care of [Caitlin] like Jem” (pp. 45–46).

It can be seen that Caitlin's life is different before and after her brother's death. She has to face the external world without him. Commenting on the autistic-non-disabled relationship, Caitlin states: “People have a hard time understanding me because I have Asperger’s so I have to try extra hard to understand them” (p. 14). As stated, some non-disabled people are ignorant of dealing with and understanding persons with Asperger’s Syndrome. Hence, posthumanism works to show how communication between the non-disabled and the disabled enables both to understand one another.

Regarding the impact of disability on the family with an autistic child, Caitlin’s father discovers that Tantrum Rage Meltdown (TRM), a willful behavior in younger children, has become a part of the family’s daily life. He gets upset about her questions. As a result, he asks the teachers at Caitlin’s school for help because he cannot deal with her. It is worth mentioning that posthumanism promotes disability awareness, fosters inclusivity, and builds a bridge that connects the autistic and the non-disabled. According to Beckett et al. (2010), “it is important to avoid falling into a tragedy-view of disability, it is equally important to avoid promoting the idea that disability is ‘difficulty free’” (p. 380). This means that disability is not a tragedy; at the same time, it is not problem-free.

It is worth mentioning that Erskine concentrates on the importance of regular school for the autistic. It makes students, with and without disability, study together and helps autistic students to be socially included and integrated. In other words, co-education allows the disabled and the non-disabled to recognize differences between persons and train them on how to communicate with one another in order to boost their understanding.

It is worth considering that school is one of the factors that promotes the successful social adaptation of a person with autism. Erskine points out that schooling includes all individuals with different capacities. To illustrate this point, children with autism have to receive knowledge as non-disabled children. As Caitlin moves into the school, she begins interacting with teachers and peers and experiences difficulties developing social skills. According to Antle (2004), “[s]chool may be the most influential social system outside the family where social norms, such as a stigmatizing view of [...] disability, often are unwittingly reproduced” (p. 172). This proves that the school system enables a person with a disability to adjust to his/her disability and integrate with others. Moreover, posthumanism has established equal opportunity for the disabled and gives the non-disabled a set of principles on how to interact with the disabled.

On this basis, Erskine emphasizes the role of teacher-to-student communication. The teacher plays a critical role in creating an environment that encourages the social inclusion of persons with Asperger’s Syndrome. Caitlin has better learning conditions because of supportive, regular conversations with Mrs Brook, a school counselor. For example, Mrs Brook helps Caitlin change her behavior to be more like the non-disabled. In other words, Caitlin undergoes a type of educational correction for unwanted conduct. For instance, Mrs Brook trains Caitlin to stop sucking her thumb when talking to others and to “[clasp her] hands together or [put] her hands in [her] pockets and [squeeze] them into fists or one of the other thing” (p. 33).

Concerning the relationship between Caitlin and some non-disabled children at school, the former feels comfortable without having friends for many reasons. Firstly, “[people] are all talking loud about anything” (p. 109). Secondly, she cannot “learn how to do empathy [for others]” (p. 67). Thirdly, people touch and run into one another (p. 35). It is noted that a lack of social skills is one aspect of Asperger’s Syndrome. Caitlin fails to make friends because non-disabled children push her into an out-group. Some non-disabled children see Caitlin as Other and different. As seen, Caitlin is rejected and isolated due to her disability. From a posthumanist point of view, empowering the disabled to embrace their sense of identity is one path to positive change. Posthumanism also raises awareness among the non-disabled to see the person first, not the disability.

At the same time, Erskine (2012) sheds light on the negative side of social relationships, especially for those with autism. Social relationships may include criticism, stigma, rejection, and unwanted demands. Hence, posthumanism works to promote disability inclusion by building inclusive attitudes that address the stigma and rejection many autistic children still face.

Commenting on the negative side of social relationships for the autistic, *Mockingbird* displays how they are an easy target of bullying. Sofronoff et al. (2011) point out: “[A]nxiety, anger, poor social skills [and] behavior problems in children with AS [Asperger’s Syndrome] [...] are predictors of bullying” (p. 395). The statement reveals that bullying arises from a child's social deficits associated with a lack of social skills. For example, Caitlin’s classmates call her disrespectful names such as freak, odd, wired, and dog because of her eccentric behavior. As a result, posthumanism emerges to challenge discriminatory behaviors of the non-disabled towards the disabled and ask the former to move beyond the body and see the person first. For Hayuningtyas (2019), the obstacles to living as a person with Asperger’s Syndrome are a lack of social skills (p. 5) and bullying (p. 6).

Regarding the misunderstanding (communication gap) between the non-disabled and the autistic at Caitlin’s school,

one of her classmates, Rachel, comes to class with a scratched-up face because she falls off her and asks her friends whether her face looks terrible or not, they tell her that her face looks fine except for Caitlin who says: “It looks bad. It’s purple and puffy and really gross” (p. 65). As a result, Rachel cries due to Caitlin’s behavior. Hence, another child, Emma, yells at Caitlin: “That was so mean. Didn’t anyone ever tell you how to be a friend” (pp. 65–6). Additionally, Caitlin decides to help Rachel by “pull[ing] [Rachel’s] desk out of the row and push it all the way to the back corner of the room and shove it up against the wall where the terrarium until the turtle died” (p. 66). It can be observed that Caitlin pushes the desk into a corner because she sees herself as a helpful person. She believes that Rachel needs a private place to hide where no one can notice her embarrassment. Hence, non-disabled children view Caitlin’s behavior as strange and unfriendly. So, Caitlin is at risk of being ignored and isolated from others due to her emotional distance. This scene asserts that the non-disabled and the autistic cannot understand the behavior of one another. Thus, posthumanism aims to promote mutual understanding and communication between the autistic and the non-disabled.

It is worth noting that people with Asperger’s Syndrome have some behaviors that need training to improve their skills. When a person with Asperger’s Syndrome feels embarrassed, he/she finds a place to hide to avoid others’ gaze. According to Stanborough (2021), “Autism masking [...] is a social survival strategy” (para. 5). Stanborough explains further: “[Autism masking] include[s] behaviours like [...] forcing or faking eye contact during conversations” (para. 5). Hence, masking autism helps and protects an autistic person from being harassed. From a posthumanist perspective, the non-disabled should understand who the disabled are and how to deal with them, change their view of the latter, and understand the latter’s behaviors.

Commenting on Mrs Brook’s role in helping Caitlin in the previous scene, she tells Caitlin: “I know that you [Caitlin] might feel comforted by sitting in the corner and not having people look at you but Rachel doesn’t [...]. To Rachel, it felt like you didn’t want to see her so you wanted to get rid of her by putting her in a corner” (p. 66). As seen above, Mrs Brook tries to make Caitlin understand the world of the non-disabled. It is worth mentioning that posthumanism aims to promote mutual understanding between the disabled and the non-disabled.

Moreover, Mrs Brook advises Caitlin to show compassion for others. She advises her to “try to feel the way someone else is feeling” (p. 67). For this reason, Caitlin is avoided by non-disabled children because they cannot comprehend problems and behaviors related to autism. Furthermore, this scene shows how competent Mrs. Brooke is in dealing with autistic children; thus, she helps Caitlin develop empathy skills.

Consequently, Mrs Brook encourages Caitlin to join a study group because the latter refuses to participate with others. Caitlin says: “I’m my own group” (p. 26), and “I can do a better project by my own self” (p. 27). Mrs Brook helps Caitlin look for the word ‘friend’ in Caitlin’s dictionary to encourage her to make friends. She tells Caitlin: “There’s a value in working with a group, [such as] [...] [m]aking friends [...], and learning how to get along with others” (p. 27). Hence, Mrs Brook seeks to help Caitlin cooperate with other non-disabled students to learn how to do the work. So, posthumanism aims to bring the autistic and the non-disabled together and create a sense of support and unity within the community.

In light of the exclusion and dehumanization of autistic children at her regular schools, Caitlin begins her journey of self-discovery with the encouragement of her teacher. She tells Mrs Brook that she hopes to make new friends, but she is dismissed by others due to her disturbing behavior. For example, when Caitlin sits next to one of her classmates, Laura, and asks her to befriend her, the latter refuses, asking her to sit at another table. At the same time, Caitlin asks another classmate, Mai, to be her friend, but the latter tells her that she wants to be alone and yells at Caitlin. For Mai, “[Caitlin is] [...] different. [...] [Caitlin is] the kind of special that’s a little weird [...] [and] [her] behavior is ... well ... disturbing” (p. 96). As seen, Caitlin is socially excluded and dehumanized because of her mental disability. Hence, posthumanism shows how discriminatory practices against the disabled make them less willing to interact with the non-disabled. As a consequence, it aims to unsettle a privileged concept of humans historically constituted by the exclusion of the disabled.

As mentioned earlier, a child with mental disability is an easy target for bullying. From the perspective of non-disabled children, Caitlin’s behavior is annoying. Therefore, Caitlin “start[s] shaking [her] hands because this word [disturbing] is too scary” (p. 97). Moreover, non-disabled children laugh at her behavior. As Iyengar (2022) puts it, “[b]ullying a person with disabilities can be considered [...] a violation of their civil rights” (para. 3). The reason for making autistic children vulnerable to bullying is their inability to express feelings and thoughts. For this purpose, bullying targets a person who does not conform to social norms. It can be said that people with autism cannot meet the normative standard and are oppressed by humanist thoughts that work against them. Hence, posthumanism challenges normalcy, which devalues the disabled because they cannot match normative humanity.

In terms of misconceptions relating to the autistic, *Mockingbird* corrects these stereotypes. It displays two children with intellectual disability: Caitlin and William. Caitlin considers William “autistic [because] [...] he screams a lot” (p. 22). As a result, when one of Caitlin’s classmates tells her that she has autism like William, she is shocked as she has a misconception that an autistic person “eats dirt and screams when [he/she] gets mad” (p. 97). As observed, Caitlin refuses to be labeled autistic because she does not eat dirt. According to Cole et al. (2016), labeling “reduces the chance of those labelled being accepted and noted for their strengths and qualities” (p. 40). As stated, labeling leads to rejection. Hence, posthumanism challenges otherness that defines some bodies as the norm and those that fall outside the norm as others. From a posthumanist perspective, otherness is a type of social oppression.

As a result, Caitlin refuses to be seen as autistic. She “[is] breathing hard and [she] want[s] to jump out of [her] skin but [she] [...] shake[s] [her] hands harder and turn and run away” (p. 98). As observed, Caitlin lacks the skill of self-

advocate and decides to go to Mrs Brook to inform her that she is not autistic. Successfully, Erskine highlights the role of a teacher in prevention of bullying. Iyengar (2022) asserts that a teacher plays a role in helping a child with autism to avoid being bullied and to escape a bullying situation by “encourage[ing] [him/her] to tell a teacher or staff member when others are purposely mean to them” (para. 14). For Iyengar (2022), this strategy can help the child “learn ways to manage bullying—and build their coping skills” (para. 14). In this regard, posthumanism criticizes the ideal of ableism and demands human rights for the disabled who are the victims of ableism and bullying.

Stressing on her role in making Caitlin accept herself and others, Mrs Brook helps Caitlin by telling her that William is a worthy person. Mrs Brook corrects misconceptions relating to the autistic. She says: “We [human beings] all fall on the spectrum of behavior somewhere [...]. Here’s the spectrum [...] [:] it’s a line and we’re all on it. Some of us are farther along the line than others” (p. 98). The spectrum refers to a set of developmental and behavioral problems related to autism. Hence, Caitlin asks her teacher where she is on the spectrum, and Mrs Brook tells her that she is “very high functioning. Very smart. Very capable” (pp. 98–99). As shown above, Mrs Brook plays a great role in shaping Caitlin’s view of herself and raising her awareness about autism and the meaning of sameness and difference.

Further, Mrs Brook acts as an interpreter in various situations that Caitlin cannot understand. She encourages Caitlin to “be very proud of [her]self for trying so hard” and accept others who are different (p. 99). It is worth considering that posthumanism concentrates on disability awareness of acknowledging, understanding, and accepting persons with disabilities. Mrs Brook also tells Caitlin: “[E]veryone is different. We all have to find our special way” (p. 42). At this point, Mrs Brook is qualified to deal with autistic children. Erskine centers the lens on the importance of accepting one another. To put it simply, *Mockingbird* helps people with or without disabilities to understand, accept, deal with, and communicate with one another.

Mrs Brook encourages Caitlin to develop her social skills. So, school is one of the factors where an autistic child can build relationships. Mazarin (2021) asserts: “Social skills are ways of dealing with others that create healthy and positive interactions. Children who have social skills can communicate clearly, calmly, and respectfully” (para. 1). Mazarin continues: “They [children who have social skills] show consideration for the feelings and interests of their peers. They take responsibility for their actions, are able to control themselves, and are able to assert themselves when needed. Children learn social skills through experiences with peers, examples and instructions from their parents, and time with adults” (para. 1). In this regard, posthumanism highlights the importance of social relationships for the disabled, because social relationships are a significant part of establishing their inclusion.

To illustrate this point, Mrs Brook encourages Caitlin to have friends. According to Mrs Brook, “friends give comfort to each other. Friends help solve problems. You [Caitlin] can share so much with friends” (p. 47). Moreover, she advises her to feel empathy by “feel[ing] the way someone else is feeling” (p. 67). As seen above, Mrs Brook wants Caitlin to be part of the majority group.

Thus, Caitlin’s friends accept her presence as a person with Asperger’s Syndrome. Graham et al. (2007) state: “Social integration refers to the degree to which a person is linked to or involved with his/her social environment at different levels, including community, an individual network of social ties, and intimate relationships” (p. 782). As stated, social relationships help a person integrate into society and give him/her value and dignity. Hence, the inclusion of the disabled in schooling and society is the focal point of posthumanism.

It is noteworthy that Erskine sheds light on the traits of regular education. Caitlin learns alongside students without disabilities in an integrated classroom. This helps her adapt to the regular methods of education. Hence, integration is a positive method that helps children with intellectual disabilities be members of the in-group. Humphrey (2008) emphasizes the importance of the inclusion of children with autism at schools. For Humphrey, the inclusion of the disabled in class helps them “(i) challenge stereotypes and raise expectations, [...], (ii) promote peer understanding, (iii) develop social skills, (iv) adapt academic subject, and (vi) modify conversational language” (p. 41).

It can be asserted that Caitlin’s friends help her feel self-accepted and feel accepted by others. Caitlin makes a friendship with Michael, a non-disabled child, because he considers her acceptable. As a result, Caitlin is happy because Michael “is the only friend [she] [has] and may be the only friend [she] will ever have” (p. 107). As observed, Caitlin begins to understand the feelings of other people. Thus, posthumanism is concerned with the integration of the autistic in school because they can imitate children without disabilities, acquire developmentally advanced skills, and learn independence. From a posthumanist perspective, integration provides a challenging environment for the autistic by giving them the chance to do what non-disabled children do and learn about sameness and difference.

Therefore, Caitlin accepts herself as a person with autism. Commenting on her self-acceptance, Cage et al. (2018) state that “personal acceptance of autism as part of one’s identity could protect against depression and anxiety” (p. 474). As seen, autism acceptance mediates the relationship between mental health difficulties and the self-esteem of the autistic. Hence, Caitlin is delighted to be in a group work with non-disabled children because she can her develop her social skills. From a posthumanist perspective, disabled people’s embrace of their disability makes them find new goals, adapt to living in society, and recognize their worth.

It is noted that acceptance of the disabled by others helps them adjust to their disability. According to Cage et al. (2018), “autism acceptance can be defined as an individual feeling accepted or appreciated as an autistic person, with autism positively recognized and accepted by others and the self as an integral part of that individual. Autism acceptance from others could be important for autistic individuals’ mental health” (p. 474). As stated, autism acceptance of self and others

is associated with the autistic's mental health outcomes.

As such, integration between non-disabled and autistic children at regular school promotes mutual understanding and raises awareness among them about sameness and difference. For instance, non-disabled children understand that autistic children refuse to be labeled as autistic because this label hurts their feelings; therefore, the autistic feel stigmatized due to their disability. For example, when Mr Mason, a PE teacher, calls William and Caitlin autistic, non-disabled children get upset, deciding to tell Mrs Brook. Therefore, Mr Mason apologizes to Caitlin because "[he] shouldn't have said that remark about autistic kids" (p. 102). This scene indicates how regular school plays a role in changing the way stereotypes and stigma are associated with children with autism. Ravet (2011) asserts that inclusion in the school "[s]eeks to minimise negative labelling and exclusion by rejecting 'autism as disease'" (p. 675). This means that regular school makes children with autism feel like human beings, not persons who need help. As a result, the main aim of posthumanism is to support the autistic by promoting mutual communication between them and non-disabled children, fostering inclusion, and raising awareness among the non-disabled about sameness and difference.

It is observed that the title of the novel *Mockingbird* is a symbol of revolt against many obstacles relating to Asperger's Syndrome. *Mockingbird* depicts the power of the voice used by the innocent to demonstrate goodwill or purity of heart. It is noted that the novel reflects the power of Caitlin's voice that calls upon the non-disabled to understand the autistic.

Hence, children at Caitlin's school begin to understand one another. Caitlin also understands that Michael, a non-disabled child, needs someone to care about him whereas she needs others to understand her. Josh, a non-disabled child, also learns how to cope with his feelings. Thus, the inclusion of the disabled in society and schooling became the focal point of posthumanism. Remarkably, posthumanism focuses on self and others and works to call the non-disabled to change their way of thinking to value and include those who are different.

Consequently, Erskine's central message in *Mockingbird* is to make people, regardless of their abilities and disabilities, understand one another better. She states: "If we all understood each other better, we could go a long way toward stopping violence. We all want to be heard, to be understood. Some of us are better than others at expressing ourselves. Some of us have severe problems that need to be addressed, not ignored, no matter what the cost" (p. 125). She continues: "Understanding people's difficulties [...] helping people understand their own difficulties and teaching them concrete ways to help themselves will help them better deal with their own lives and, in turn, ours" (p. 125). Hence, posthumanism emphasizes the collaboration between the disabled and the non-disabled.

Furthermore, Erskine sheds light on the importance of regular school for a person with autism. It helps non-disabled and disabled children understand one another better, make them value diversity, and raise their awareness about sameness and difference. According to Corbett (2010), "one of the really useful things about [...] *Mockingbird* is that it opens a window for kids on what the different kid in their class might be going through" (para. 7). As stated above, Erskine presents the power of disabled voices in highlighting their experiences while promoting and encouraging respect for differences. Erskine's purpose is to provide insight into many of the messages sent to the non-disabled about those with different disabilities. Posthumanism gives a voice to the disabled to encourage the non-disabled to change their attitudes toward them.

V. FINDINGS

This study illustrates how *Mockingbird* is an effective literary tool for defying entrenched stereotypes about disability. It promotes shifting public perceptions towards autism by describing the inner world of an autistic child in a way that stimulates empathy, understanding, and inclusion. The study highlights those disabled children, through Caitlin's voice, possess strong validation of their lived experience, viewing themselves as whole, dignified human beings who are acceptable to society. Disability representation in children's literature enables disabled individuals to build positive self-identities and a sense of belonging. For able-bodied children, the book is an agent of affective development: it compels them to shed their normative paradigms, empathetically live out "otherness", and acknowledge the common humanity that unites all human beings. In line with this, *Mockingbird* contributes to the dismantling of ableist structures through its valorization of relational understanding over biological essentialism. In a new turn, the book illustrates how posthumanist fiction such as *Mockingbird* does not just humanize the autistic other, but also offers another, relational vision of the human founded upon acceptance, fluidity, and ethical co-becoming.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study has shown how Kathryn Erskine's *Mockingbird* successfully places autistic people within the broader humanist narrative by authenticating their subjectivity, agency, and right to belonging. With Caitlin's voice, Erskine bridges the emotional and communicative divide between non-disabled and disabled communities, helping them understand and be compassionate towards each other. The research confirms that literature can be an effective tool of social change: by offering realistic portrayals of disability, it disestablishes stereotypes, undermines ableist assumptions, and cultivates a culture of acceptance and empathy. *Mockingbird* exceeds hegemonic disability stories in offering a posthumanist portrait of relationality whereby sameness and difference are both valued rather than pathologized. Erskine's practice then supports wider social movements of inclusivity, challenging society to accept neurodiversity not as a

deviation, but as a normal aspect of the human condition. Lastly, the research stresses that the acceptance of difference gives rise to a more ethical, humane, and relational society — a vision which highlights posthumanist theory.

This research provides some fruitful directions for future work in the areas of posthumanist literary theory and disability studies. First, further research could explore how posthumanist theory could be extended to encompass a greater body of children's literature that features neurodiverse protagonists, most significantly those beyond autism, i.e., ADHD or dyslexia. Second, longitudinal research could examine the real-world impact of literary representations like *Mockingbird* on the attitudes and beliefs of young readers regarding disabled individuals. This empirical work would be valuable in shedding light on literature's potential as a revolutionary educational intervention.

Furthermore, comparative analyses involving *Mockingbird* and various international children's literature may uncover cultural differences in the portrayal of disability and inclusivity.

Last, the theoretical convergences of intersectionality and posthumanism—considering disability alongside race, gender, and class—are a fertile and possibly underresearched field that can be explored by future academic studies to generate more inclusive models of human variation and ethical issues. Overall, then, this work highlights the critical need for continued literary and theoretical engagement with disability to advance greater inclusivity, understanding, and ethical relations in literature and society.

Briefly, this article contends that disability's reconceptualization in posthumanist terms is not merely a literary project but a necessary ethical imperative. By raising the voices of the oppressed and demanding a vision of common humanity, *Mockingbird* is a compelling witness to literature's capacity to subvert prevailing paradigms and construct inclusive possibilities.

This project calls on academics, teachers, and readers to recognize the profound potential of story to transform social consciousness and to continue striving towards a world where diversity is not merely tolerated but celebrated.

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