



كلية التربية للعلوم الإنسانية
College of Education for Human Sciences

ISSN: 1817-6798 (Print)

Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities

available online at: www.jtuh.org/

JTUH
مجلة جامعة تكريت للعلوم الإنسانية
Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities

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Keywords:

Autism,
Autistic Identity Disability Literature,
Graeme Simson's Trilogy,
Narrative Prosthesis.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 Sept 2024
Received in revised form 25 Nov 2024
Accepted 2 Dec 2024
Final Proofreading 2 Mar 2025
Available online 3 Mar 2025

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Journal of Tikrit University for Humanities

Fictional Representation of Autistic Identity through Graeme Simson's The Rosie Trilogy

A B S T R A C T

Graeme Simson's Trilogy: The Rosie Project, The Rosie Effect, The Rosie Result is a significant fictional work in its depiction of autism within the framework of disability literature. Simson's trilogy serves as a gentle critique of societal norms that often marginalize those who do not fit the neurotypical mold. Through Don and his son's experiences with autism, Simson addresses the readers to reconsider the social model of autistic identity and thus to reevaluate its performance. The study relies heavily upon theoretical frameworks of narrative prosthesis, metamodernist and Aristotelian rhetoric through which Simson represents the autistic identity. The study follows a structural approach which enables the researcher to come across the layers of the examined literary work through emphasizing the collaborative relationship between content and form.

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.25130/jtuh.32.3.2.2025.16>

التمثيل الخيالي للهوية التوحدية من خلال ثلاثية روزي لجرايم سيمسون

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الخلاصة:

ثلاثية جرايم سيمسون: مشروع روزي، تأثير روزي، نتيجة روزي هو عمل خيالي مهم في تصويره لمرض التوحد في إطار أدب الإعاقة. تعمل ثلاثية سيمسون كنقد لطيف للمعايير الاجتماعية التي غالباً ما تهتمش أولئك الذين لا يتوافقون مع القالب العصبي. من خلال تجارب دون وابنه مع التوحد، يخاطب سيمسون القراء لإعادة النظر في النموذج الاجتماعي لهوية التوحد وبالتالي إعادة تقييم أدائه. تعتمد الدراسة بشكل كبير على الأطر النظرية بدائل السردية، والبلاغة الأرسطية التي من خلالها يمثل سيمسون هوية التوحد.

وتتبع الدراسة نهجاً هيكلياً يتيح للباحث أن يأتي عبر طبقات من العمل الأدبي المفحص من خلال التأكيد على العلاقة التعاونية بين المحتوى والشكل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التوحد، الهوية التوحديّة، أدب الإعاقة، ثلاثية غرايم سيمسون، بدائل السردية.

1. From Words to World: The Evolution of Graeme Simsion

Graeme Simsion, an esteemed Australian author and former IT consultant, embarked on a new chapter in his career at the age of fifty when he ventured into the realm of fiction writing. His decision concerning writing fiction, Simsion had authored two highly regarded nonfiction books on database design. In 2013, Simsion introduced his debut novel, *The Rosie Project*, to the literary world. This novel has since been translated into forty languages, solidifying its position as a global bestseller. The overwhelming success of *The Rosie Project* (2013) paved the way for two sequels, *The Rosie Effect* (2014) and *The Rosie Result* (2019), both of which also achieved bestseller status. Simsion's distinctive storytelling style and compelling characters have captivated readers worldwide, earning him a devoted following. His ability to craft engaging narratives has established him as a prominent figure in the literary landscape (Goodreads, 2019).

The Rosie Trilogy comprises three novels authored by Graeme Simsion, following the story of Don Tillman, a genetics professor who was born with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) but never diagnosed with it. At the beginning of the first novel, *The Rosie Project* (2013), Don presents a questionnaire to find a suitable partner, which he refers to as *The Wife Project*. He then encounters Rosie, a Ph.D student in the psychology department, who is the total antithesis of Don. They go on a mission to identify Rosie's biological father by gathering DNA samples from various sources and at various occasions. Ultimately, Don developed romantic feelings for Rosie and made the decision to improve himself for her, leading him to propose to her. In the second book, titled "*The Rosie Effect*" (2014), Don and Rosie, who are ten months into their marriage in New York City, are confronted with the stunning revelation that Rosie is pregnant. As Don prepares himself for parenthood, he has some concerns about his suitability to raise Rosie and their unborn child. Don endeavours to undertake preparations for parenting and provide assistance to Rosie in her own

preparation, relying on scientific knowledge and the untrustworthy guidance of his friends. The unconventional method employed by Don estranges Rosie and ultimately results in the disintegration of their marital relationship. Don actively seeks out Rosie and successfully convinces her to come back. A boy named Hudson is born to Don and Rosie during their reconsulation at the end of the story. The third book, titled "The Rosie Result" (2019), begins eleven years after the happenings of "The Rosie Effect." Currently residing in Melbourne, Australia, Don and Rosie are the proud parents of Hudson, a highly brilliant and distinctive twelve-year-old boy. Upon observing Hudson's social and scholastic difficulties at school, Don and Rosie get alarmed and actively pursue solutions to assist their son. Ultimately, the novel concludes with the diagnosis of autism in Don and Rosie's son Hudson, and Don's subsequent acceptance and support of his kid's condition.

Simsion began his writing career by enrolling in a novel class and improving his skills through the creation of multiple short stories. His hard work paid off when his piece, "Three Encounters with the Physical," earned second place in The Age Short Story Award. However, it was a project he developed during his first-year screenwriting course that truly caught attention. "The Klara Project Phase 1" served as a precursor to a screenplay and was recognized as a runner-up in the Fellowship of Australian Writers Jennifer Burbridge Award.

Simsion's initial venture into published fiction highlighted the compelling character of Don Tillman, demonstrating that his voice resonated just as strongly on the page as it did on the screen. Encouraged by this success, Simsion set out to transform "The Rosie Project" into a novel, completing the draft in a mere four weeks and dedicating an additional three weeks to refining it. His efforts were rewarded when the manuscript won the Victorian Premier's Award for an Unpublished Manuscript in 2012. Following this achievement, Simsion secured a publishing contract with Text Publishing and attracted interest from international markets. Sony Pictures also recognized the potential of "The Rosie Project," resulting in a lucrative deal for the screenplay. Simsion's rapid ascent to success serves as a testament to his talent and unwavering dedication to his craft (Bios, n. d).

Graeme Simsion attributes the inspiration for his novel, *The Rosie Project*, to his former colleagues in the information technology field. One particular

colleague, who shared a similar approach to relationships as the protagonist, Don Tillman, in the book, had a unique method of seeking a partner. This colleague referred to it as his "wife project," which involved meticulously crafting a questionnaire for potential partners, actively participating in singles events, and purposefully seeking a romantic connection. It is important to note that Simsion clarifies that this colleague was never formally diagnosed as autistic. Reflecting on his past experiences, Simsion recalls encountering individuals akin to Don through his involvement in the radio club and his studies in physics during his school years (Deseret News, 2023).

Simsion has often been asked whether he served as the real-life inspiration for the character Don Tillman, and he is prepared with a response. The answer is no. It has been disclosed that Don was actually inspired by one of Simsion's jogging companions, and many events in the book, such as the memorable yellow jacket incident, are based on true occurrences. However, while Simsion denies being Don himself, he does admit to possessing some geek-like qualities and ultimately concludes that, "There's a bit of Don in all of us" (Beyond the Flow, 2014).

During an interview with Graeme Simsion, he was questioned about the possibility of writing a sequel to "The Rosie Project." Initially, he had firmly decided against it, having tied up all loose ends in the tradition of a romantic comedy with a happy ending, and was well into a new novel when he had a change of heart. Some readers and critics have argued that the happy ending in the story was unrealistic, suggesting that Don and Rosie would inevitably face challenges in their marriage. While it is true that all couples encounter difficulties at some point, Simsion was determined to delve deeper into their relationship and illustrate how they could overcome obstacles in their own unique ways.

Furthermore, he believed that there was still much to uncover about Don as a character, and he was eager to explore the untapped potential within him. It took some time for him to find the right approach to continue their story, but he was committed to doing justice to their journey (Book Page, 2015). Simsion's approach to writing about autism is both sensitive and insightful, compelling readers to reconsider their preconceived notions about the condition. By humanizing his characters and authentically portraying their experiences, Simsion fosters a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by individuals

on the autism spectrum. His writing not only captivates and entertains but also serves as a catalyst for dialogue and awareness surrounding autism and the significance of acceptance and inclusion.

As an author delving into the realm of autism, Simsion offers a fresh perspective to the literary landscape by illuminating the experiences of those living with this condition. Through his meticulously crafted characters and compelling narratives, Simsion prompts readers to reevaluate their perceptions of autism and embrace neurodiversity in all its facets. By depicting the complexities and obstacles encountered by individuals on the autism spectrum with sincerity and empathy, Simsion's writing emerges as a potent instrument for fostering awareness and fostering understanding of autism within society.

2. Don Tillman's Unmasked Autism

Being different does not work synonymously with being incapable of fitting in. However, the constructions of the autistic identity is intricately intertwined with the societal performative understandings of abnormal development. A broad spectrum of the theories emerges to highlight the causes of autism. While some of them are psychologically oriented, there are others that are grounded on biological and neurological perspectives. In other words, major theories of autism generally believe that autistic individuals exhibit a deficiency that requires investigation, categorization, and potential modification if the theory indicates capability. The prevalent connection among the theories is a belief that there is an inherent deficiency in the autistic individual.

Don Tillman recalls his memories in school and how he is seen as different from the other students : "I had an uneventful time at school. I enjoyed the science subjects. I did not have many friends and was briefly the object of bullying." (Simsion, 2013. 32.132) Examining Don's expression "uneventful time" may motivate one's imagination; one may imagine Don, the child, sitting alone with no companionship at the ditch of the school without being engaged

in any normal childlike activities such as playing. He does not have distinguished memories about normal childhood. Being a semi outsider is exactly the reason behind treating Don as a target of bullying. This act, namely building , is intensified because of the fact that Don is "the top student in the school"; however, this rank fuels his feelings of depression—a matter that prevents him from " fit [...] into a simplistic category. I now believe that virtually all my problems could be attributed to my brain's being configured differently from those of the majority of humans (Simsion, 2013. 32.132). In examining this through the lens of Foucault's concept of power relations and Cartesian duality , the dichotomy of the Self and the Other becomes apparent. In other words, the societal pressure to conform to normative standards of mental health created a power dynamic in which Don's experiences are subjected to external scrutiny and classification. This process of Othering enforces the notion that his struggles are inherently different from those of the majority, perpetuating a sense of alienation and isolation.

The author provides numerous examples of the bullying that Don endures due to his autism. These instances are not only frustrating, but also deeply hurtful.

But it was annoying. Like being ‘accidentally’ bumped when I was carrying books or having my pencil case emptied or my exercise book scribbled on or my lunch interfered with or my style of speaking mimicked or my gait imitated or my attempts to hit a ball laughed at or being referred to by my nickname or being the target of a teacher’s wit. An accumulation of reminders that I wasn’t average and didn’t fit in (Simsion, 2019. 3.14).

These actions served as constant reminders that he was different from his peers and struggled to fit in Don's experiences vividly illustrate Foucault's concept of the docile body and binary opposition. By sharing his personal struggles, Don sheds light on the societal norms and power dynamics that perpetuate discrimination against individuals who do not conform to the

perceived "average." His story serves as a poignant reminder of the importance of empathy, understanding, and acceptance in creating a more inclusive and compassionate society.

He also remembers when he changes his study from computer science to genetics because of incident that happened in his twenty-first birthday :

I don't generally celebrate birthdays, but my family had insisted in this case and had invited numerous friends and relatives to compensate for my own lack of friends. My uncle made a speech. I understood that it was traditional to make fun of the guest of honor, but my uncle became so encouraged by his ability to provoke laughter that he kept going, telling story after story. I was shocked to discover that he knew some extremely personal facts, and I realized that my mother must have shared them with him. She was pulling at his arm, trying to get him to stop, but he ignored her and did not stop until he noticed that she was crying, by which time he had completed a detailed exposition of my faults and of the embarrassment and pain that they had caused. The core of the problem, it seemed, was that I was a stereotypical computer geek. So I decided to change (Simsion, 2013.32.132).

This scenario could be seen as a reflection of how individuals with autism may struggle to navigate social situations and advocate for themselves when faced with mockery or mistreatment. The uncle's behavior also highlights a common misconception about autism - that it is acceptable to make jokes at the expense of individuals with autism or use their differences as fodder for entertainment. This perpetuates harmful stereotypes and reinforces ableist attitudes towards those with autism.

The fact that Don becomes a highly known associate professor of genetics does not prevent him from being laughed at the first mistake he does. Being invited into the Faculty ball in his University, Don has to practice dancing with a skeleton in order to avoid any mistake when he meets his partner in the ball

but all his practicing could not prevent him from tension of being in contact with another human :

I took her in the standard jive hold that I had practiced on the skeleton, and immediately felt the awkwardness, approaching revulsion, that I feel when forced into intimate contact with another human. I had mentally prepared for this, but not for a more serious problem. I had not practiced with music.[...] We were immediately tripping over each other and the net effect was a *disaster*. Bianca tried to lead, but I had no experience with a living partner, let alone one who was trying to be in control.

People began laughing, I am an expert at being laughed at and, as Bianca pulled away from me, I scanned the audience to see who was not laughing, an excellent means of identifying friends. Gene and Rosie and, surprisingly, the Dean and her partner were my friends tonight. Stefan was definitely not (Simsion, 2013.17.103).

It becomes evident that Don's autistic identity is unfairly scrutinized and criticized for a simple mistake in dancing. The inability to navigate the complexities of social interactions and non-verbal cues is often misconstrued as incompetence or ineptitude, leading to feelings of isolation and alienation. Despite his best efforts to adapt and engage with others, Don's differences are magnified and used against him, highlighting the inherent biases and prejudices that exist within society.

After practicing and living childhood and adulthood marked by alienation and Otherness, Don becomes a highly known associate professor of genetics at a university in Melbourne, Australia. Yet, he still faces the problem of being different in terms of scientific and academic argument concerning evolution

theory and religious dogma. Once upon a time he is called to the Dean's office where the latter confronts him with the problem Don used to live with:

"Don," she said, "as usual you haven't technically broken any rules. But how can I put it? - if someone told me that a lecturer had brought a dead fish to class and given it to a student who had made a statement of religious faith, I would guess that the lecturer was you. Do you understand where I'm coming from?"

The Dean's words are empty of any prejudice or humiliation, they are rather full of logic so as to place the reader on the partial side. Being unsophisticated in her perspective enables the Dean to stop at nothing when it comes to judging others for their way of teaching. Though she implicitly reflects her societal performative perspective about Don's different mentality, she tries by means of rhetorical logic to express the collective normality, rather than superiority, of other professors. In response, Don answers: "You're saying that I am the person in the faculty most likely to act unconventionally. And you want me to act more conventionally. That seems an unreasonable request to make of a scientist." The perspective offered by autism narratives is profound. It provides a framework and language that enables readers to comprehend the distinctiveness of the autistic individual and his subjective reality, facilitating intersubjective understanding if there was previously just mutual misunderstanding. As a metamodernist novel, *Simsion* tries to foster to conflict inside Don, the different professor, by means placing the reader inside him via first person narration:

The argument ended, once again, with the Dean being unhappy with me. though I had not broken any rules, and my being reminded that I needed to try harder to "fit in." [...] I was aware of a tightness in my chest and realized it was a physical response to the Dean's advice. I knew that if I could not "fit in" in a science department of a university, I could not fit in anywhere (Simsion,2013.11.63).

According to Foucault's concept of docile bodies, it is evident that the pressure to "fit in" can have implications beyond mere social conformity. This notion of fitting in, particularly in relation to disability literature, raises questions about the expectations placed on individuals to conform to societal norms, even within academic settings.

Debating the Dean takes Don to a same like situation, represented via flashback, when he was a student:

The scenario triggered a memory from my first week at a new school, of being sent to the principal's office as a result of allegedly inappropriate behavior. The purported misconduct involved a rigorous questioning of our religious education teacher. In retrospect, I understood that she was a well-meaning person, but she used her position of power over an eleven-year-old to cause me considerable distress. The principal was, in fact, reasonably sympathetic but warned me that I needed to show "respect." But he was too late: as I walked to his office, I had made the decision that it was pointless to try to fit in. I would be the class clown for the next six years (Simsion,2013.32.184).

It is evident that the power dynamics in the school environment can have a profound impact on individuals with disabilities. In the above situation, the teacher's actions may have been particularly challenging for someone with autism who may struggle with social cues and authority figures. The phrase "fit in" takes on a deeper significance. For individuals with autism, the concept of fitting in can be particularly challenging. In spite of Don's autistic intelligence, the pressure to conform to social norms and expectations can be overwhelming, leading to feelings of isolation and alienation.

In their *Autistic Intelligence* (2022), Douglas W. Maynard and Jason Turowetz explain :

The stories about what we are calling the language of autism demonstrate how caretakers may learn to appreciate and use a child's competence and skill, even in the midst of disruptive behavior that is troublesome from a commonsense point of view. Taken differently, such behavior, in our view, can exhibit first-order, fundamental competence and autistic intelligence, so long as they are appreciated as such. (21)

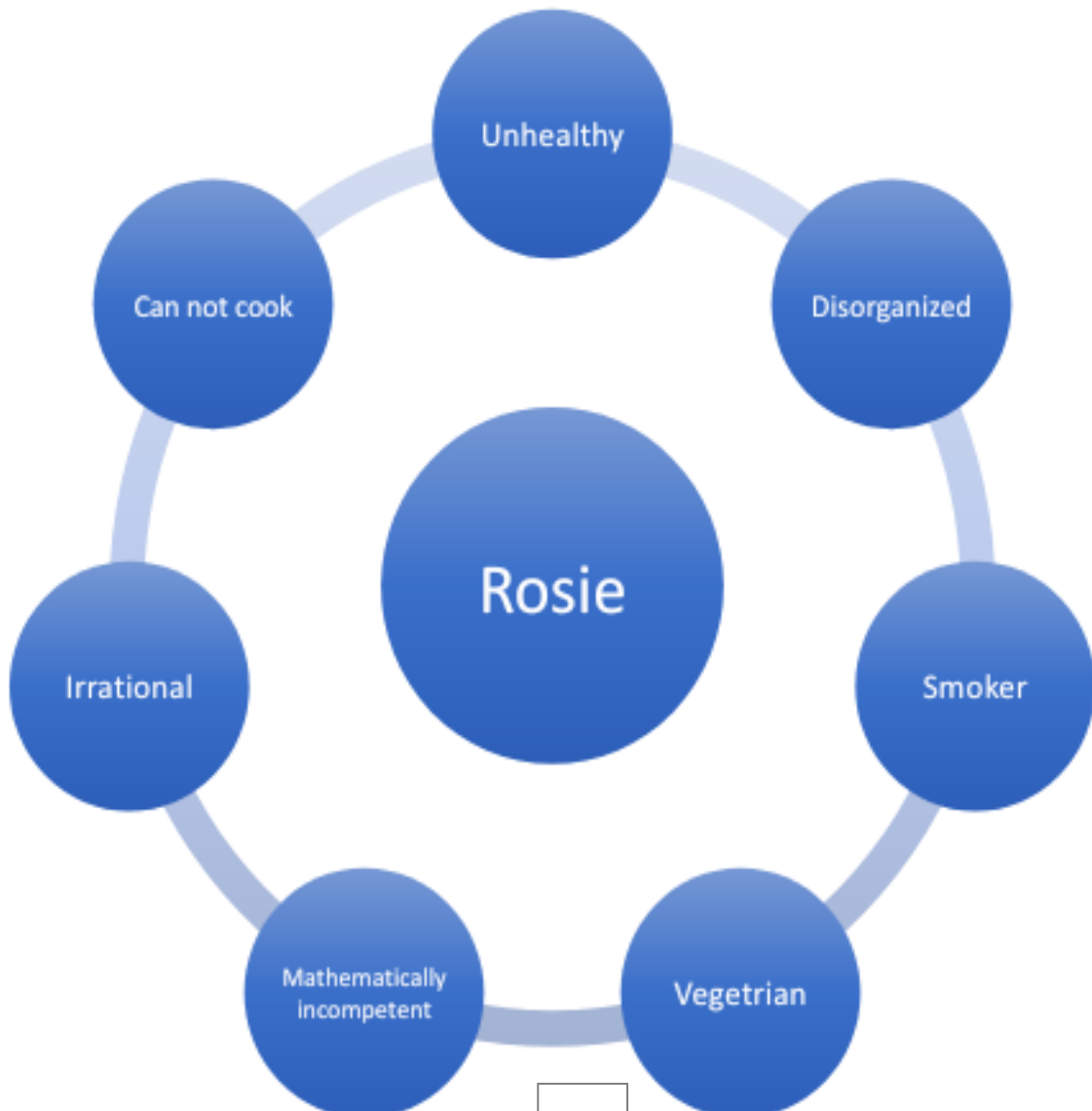
Through his logical thinking and reasonable reactions, Don exemplifies autistic intelligence, a form of sensemaking characterized by unique and unconventional utilization of competence. Unlike first-order fundamental competence, second-order fundamental competence, as Maynard and Turowetz illustrate, entails tacit, taken-for-granted practices for assembling social actions into larger, routine social activities. (21) These activities range from simple greeting interactions, which include fundamental skills such as shared attention, mutual gaze alignment, turn-taking, inquiring, and replying, to medical examinations, judicial hearings, and clinical assessments. The difference between first and second-order fundamental competence can be simply explained by the following imagined yet possible example derived from the routine of daily life: An autistic son is asked by his father to make a pot of tea. Sometime later the father asks his son, 'Where's the tea?' The son replies, 'In the pot, of course.' The son is unaware that the original request implies the preparation and presentation of a cup of tea for his father. The son demonstrates first-order competence by heating water and steeping the tea, in accordance with his father's instruction. However, he fails in second-order competence—what "the original request implies"—which is structural and abstract, beyond the literal interpretation of the original order to include the implicit dimensions of an utterance's action. The request "Please make a pot of tea" encompasses many implicit but well recognized performative elements: heating water, pouring the water over tea leaves, steeping for several minutes, pouring into cups, and serving the drinks.

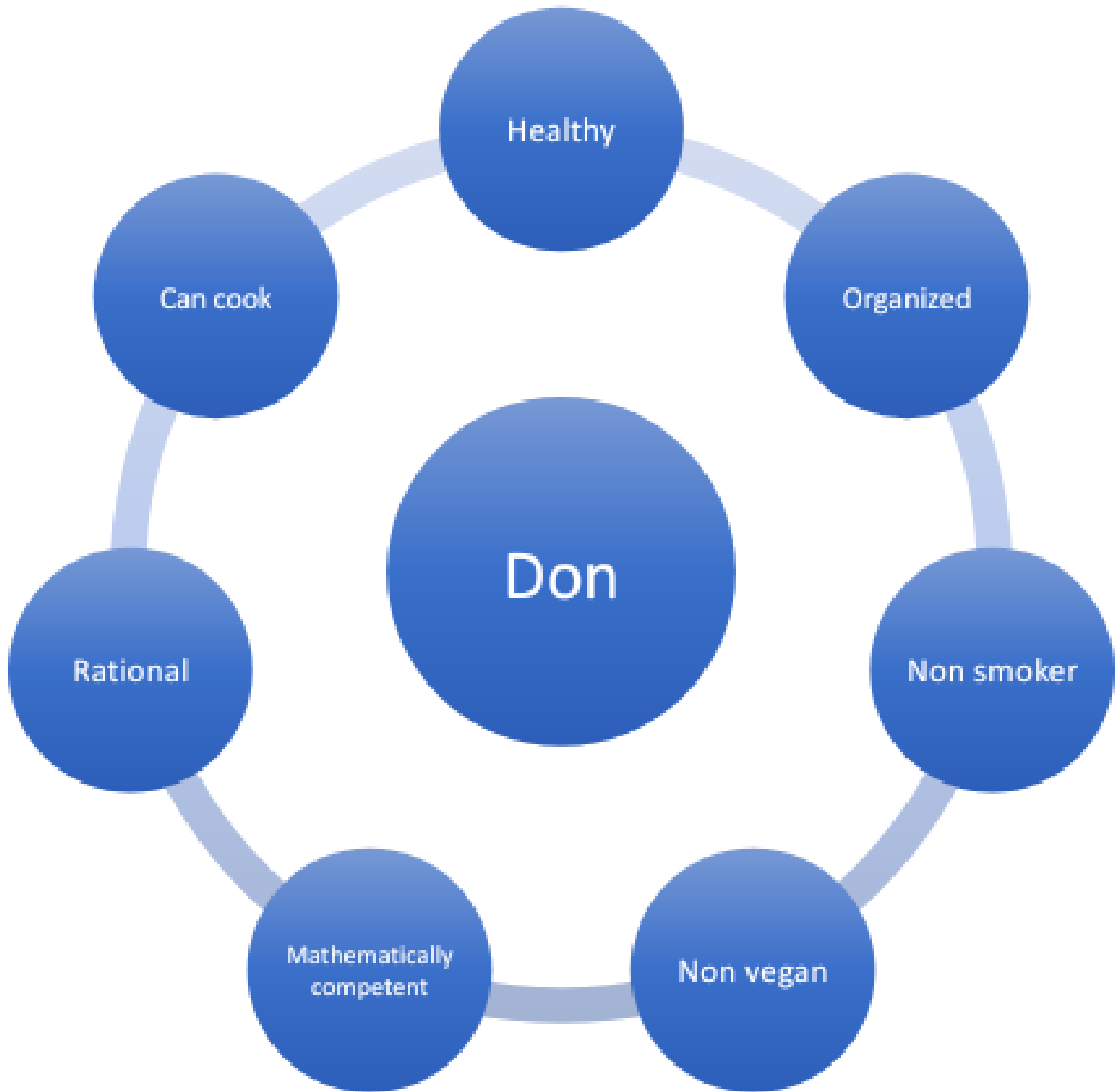
‘How can we have interesting discussions if we don’t identify common domains?’

‘I don’t know, Don. But Rosie is not fond of geneticists telling psychologists what to do. Case in point, me. Second case in point, you.’

I explained how the Lesbian Mothers Project would provide me with valuable knowledge relevant to parenthood.

‘Good work,’ said Gene. ‘You can tell her how to do motherhood as well as psychology.’ He put his hands up in dual stop signs. ‘I’m being sarcastic. You do *not* want to tell her how to be a mother. If you learn something from the project, wonderful, but surprise her with your skills rather than beating her over the head with your knowledge.’





Even after he settles down with Rosie, Don finds himself a different person due to people's treatment of him. When Rosie tells him that she is pregnant he loses his temper , or as he calls it having a meltdown, he leaves the apartment without saying a word and ends up fighting with his neighbor because of a misunderstanding. Eventually the superintendent encounter Don :

'Mr Tillman, we've had a serious complaint from one of your neighbours. Apparently you assaulted him.'

'Incorrect. He assaulted me, and I used the minimum level of aikido necessary to prevent injury to both of us. Also, he turned my wife's underwear purple and insulted her with profanities.'

'So you assaulted him.'

'Incorrect.'

'Don't sound incorrect to me. You just told me you used karate on him.'

I was about to argue, but before I could say anything he made a speech.

"Mr. Tillman, we have a waiting list so long for apartments in this building. He spaced his hands in a way that was presumably meant to provide evidence for his assertion. We throw you out, your apartment will be taken by someone, someone normal, the next day. And this isn't no warning-I'll be talking to the owners. We don't need weirdos, Mr Tillman (Simsion, 2014.4.36).

It is clear that the superintendent is using these terms to judge Mr. Tillman's behavior based on societal norms and expectations. The implication is that individuals who do not conform to these norms are seen as abnormal or weird. It is important to recognize that individuals with autism may exhibit behaviors that are considered outside of typical social norms. This does not mean that they are inherently weird or abnormal, but rather have different ways of interacting with the world around them.

People with ASD have difficulties with empathy, which is likely related to social communication deficits in mindreading and emotional recognition. (Frith, 2001) This can be linked when Don's father dies and Don finds himself unable to express his feeling like normal people :

"Although my brain did not seem to have a specific emotion that I could call 'grieving', my thoughts had been dominated—overwhelmed—by memories of my childhood and my final moments with my father.

'We grieve in different ways,' said Rosie. 'I think you're so...cerebral...that you translate your shock into thinking rather than feeling. If that makes sense.' (Simsion, 2019.21.96)

Don's lack of empathy, as described by Aristotle, may make it difficult for him to express traditional emotions like sadness or grief. However, Rosie's observation that Don processes his emotions through thinking rather than feeling suggests that he is still processing his father's death in his own way.

"Almost zero had changed externally since I'd decided to identify as an aspie—as autistic. I had little doubt that I shared a set of attributes with many other humans, including Hudson, Laszlo, Liz the Activist, Dov, Tazza the Geek, and possibly Blanche and Gene, and that the best available label was autism. The questionnaires and checklists that showed me to be neurotypical were addressing, at best, a subset of these attributes, focusing on problematic behaviours—behaviours which, in my case, had been modified by a lifetime of trying to fit in." (Simsion, 2019.211)

Don finally finds reconciliation within himself and in this context it refers to the process of coming to terms with one's identity as an autistic individual.

3. Two Sides of the Same Coin: Don and Hudson Tillmans' Autism Experience

The relationship between Don Tillman and his son Hudson reminds the readers of The 17th-century variation "Like father, like son; like mother, like daughter" is cited by American Heritage. This proverb can be found in *Bibliotheca Scholastica Instructissima* (1616), a collection of proverbs compiled by the English theologian Thomas Draxe.

This is revealed through a moment of realization by Don himself when he remembers the ideas and opinions of his friends :

Isaac Esler: *Hudson's life has parallels with your own.*



Allannah: *You and Hudson are peas in a pod.*

Liz the Activist: *The socially marginalised need to support each other.* (Simsion, 2019.11.48)

Don the father and Hudson the son share a unique bond as individuals on the autism spectrum. Just like Isaac Esler and Allannah pointed out, their lives have parallels with each other. Don's understanding and acceptance of Hudson's

struggles mirror his own experiences, making them peas in a pod. Liz the Activist's belief in the importance of supporting socially marginalised individuals rings true in this relationship, highlighting the need for mutual understanding and empathy within the autism community. The strong connection between Don and Hudson serves as a reminder of the power of solidarity and shared experiences in navigating life with autism.

Muhle, Trentacoste and Rapin mention in their article *The Genetics of Autism* "Autism is not a disease but a syndrome with multiple non genetic and genetic causes." (2004. 472). This suggests that while genetics may play a role in the development of autism, environmental factors and individual behaviors can also contribute to the manifestation of the disorder. It highlights the complex nature of autism and emphasizes the importance of considering both genetic and non-genetic influences when studying and treating the condition. This can be linked when Don explains to his psychiatric friend Claudia about Hudson's problem in school and how teachers ask him if Hudson has autism and she replies: " I know you're primed to think in genetic terms, but don't forget environment. Hudson's got your genes, but he's also grown up with you as a father, and... well... some of your traits... overlap with the diagnostic criteria." (Simsion, 2019. 10.43-44).

Hudson realizes that he is different from other students when he sees his parents' excessive attention by asking about his behavior in school and by trying to make him learn more skills :

'Mr Warren thinks there's something wrong with me, doesn't he? Because I hate cricket and Harry Potter, and wear shorts, and I'm friends with a girl. And I know stuff he doesn't know. And... ' Hudson stood up. 'That's why you're making me do all this training. You want to change me.'

'The goal is to make school easier,' I said.

'You don't like me the way I am. If you did, you wouldn't want to change me.' (Simsion, 2019. 28.126)

Foucault's concept of the docile body refers to individuals being trained and disciplined to conform to societal norms and expectations. Don is trying to mold Hudson into a more "acceptable" version of himself by making him do training in order to make school easier for him. This can be seen as an attempt to discipline Hudson's body and mind to fit into the standard expectations of society. Hudson perceives this as a rejection of his true self and a desire to make him conform to societal norms.

After this incident, Hudson finds himself struggling to fit in the society and makes more friends and acts like normal children. Don discovers this when he sees a paper in Hudson's room with the instructions below :

Run every day

Talk to Blanche

Parties

Don't talk about the app

No meltdowns

Nobody likes a show-off

SHUT UP (Sinsion, 2019. 40. 180)

As Don reads through the instructions , he realizes that they were a coping mechanism for Hudson to navigate social interactions and fit in with his peers. The reader can recognize that these instructions are a way for Hudson to translate Aristotle's Rhetorics - the art of persuasion and communication - in his everyday life. Hudson's list of instructions reflects his efforts to navigate social interactions in a way that feels comfortable and manageable for him.

After reading the list Don and Rosie find themselves responsible for making Hudson behave like this:

‘This is so sad,’said Rosie. ‘What are we doing to him?’

‘It’s about fitting in,’ I said. ‘We’ve tried to help him, but he’s realised that he needs to do it himself. Psychologists agree that change needs to come from personal

commitment...’

‘Don, I’ve got a PhD in psychology. I don’t need a lecture on motivation. I’m sad that he needs to do this at all. I love him as he is.’

‘Agreed. Me also. But the world doesn’t. The school world. A lot of the rest of the world.’

‘That was your life, wasn’t it?’

‘When I was young. It wasn’t just the world that didn’t like me. *I* didn’t like me. I *wanted* to change.’ (Simsion, 2019.40.180-181)

‘This year I learned that I was autistic, and I learned that a lot of people think autistic people are weird or uncaring or not good enough to go to a normal high school.’(Simsion, 2019.44.198)

Hudson understands that being autistic is just a part of who he is, and it does not define his abilities. Hudson embraces his unique perspective and talents, knowing that they make him special and valuable in his own way. ‘My parents and teachers tried really hard to help me fit in because they didn’t want people to think I was autistic and then assume those things about me. This semester I decided to show that I can do all the things that “normal” people do’—Hudson illustrated his point with a one-handed air-quotes sign—‘and I think I managed to, because I’ve been accepted to the senior school.’ (Simsion,2019.44.199)

He no longer feels the need to conform to societal expectations or change himself to please others. Instead, he focuses on being true to himself and finding acceptance and understanding from those who truly appreciate him for who he is.

‘Next year I’m planning to go to a special school, so I can practise being myself without pressure to act like someone I’m not, and when I’m ready I want to come back here to get the best chance of being a lawyer while still being myself, so I can advocate for people who aren’t good at speaking for themselves.’ (Simsion, 2019.44.199)

This speech reflects a sense of reconciliation with the self, particularly in terms of autistic identity and suggests a recognition and acceptance of their own unique identity, free from the need to mask or hide their true self.

In terms of Aristotle's Rhetorics, ethos is evident in the speaker's credibility and character as they express their personal journey and aspirations. The authenticity of their voice adds weight to their words and makes their message more compelling.

Pathos is present in the emotional appeal of the speaker's desire to advocate for those who struggle to speak for themselves. This evokes empathy and compassion from the audience, as they can understand the importance of standing up for marginalized individuals.

Logos is demonstrated through the logical progression of the speaker's plan - attending a special school to practice being themselves, then returning to pursue a career as a lawyer advocating for others.

The representation of autism in The Rosie Trilogy highlights the complexity and diversity of autistic identity, challenging stereotypes and promoting a more nuanced understanding of neurodiversity. Through the use of pathos, logos, and ethos in Aristotle's Rhetoric, as well as the principles of Metamodernism, Simsion effectively captures the emotional, logical, and ethical dimensions of living with autism.

By examining the experiences of Don and Hudson, readers can see how autism manifests differently in each character, shedding light on the spectrum of abilities and challenges within the autistic community. The novels also explore the interplay between nature and nurture in shaping autistic identity, suggesting that both genetic predisposition and environmental factors play a role in the development of autism.

The Rosie Trilogy offers a rich and multifaceted portrayal of autistic identity that challenges traditional narratives and invites readers to reconsider their preconceptions about what it means to be autistic. Through its thoughtful exploration of character dynamics and themes of acceptance and understanding

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