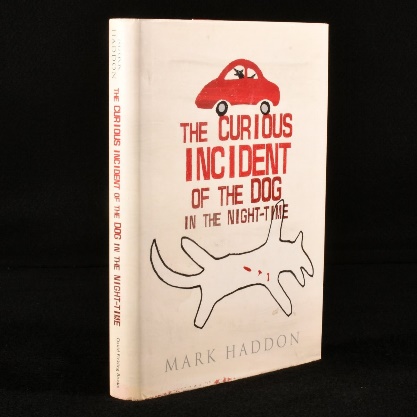
**New York Times Review**

**By Jay McInerney**

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When Christopher discovers his neighbour's poodle dead, skewered on a pitchfork, he sets out to solve the mystery and to write a true account of his detective work. In so doing he inadvertently[[1]](#footnote-1) stumbles upon the messy, illogical, emotionally complicated secrets of his parents and their neighbours. And even as he is finally forced to come to some limited accommodation of this knowledge, he makes a kind of plausible case for his own, ostensibly[[2]](#footnote-2) crippled worldview. Perhaps the greatest mystery here is whether Christopher is capable of change -- a question that goes to the heart of certain deeply held convictions[[3]](#footnote-3) about character.

If all this sounds somewhat grim and clinical, it's not. Christopher's skewed perspective and fierce logic make him a superb straightforward narrator, if not necessarily a stellar detective. In the course of interrogating one of his neighbours, while waiting impatiently for her to cut the chitchat, he observes: ''Mrs. Alexander was doing what is called chatting, where people say things to each other which aren't questions and answers and aren't connected. . . . I tried to do chatting by saying, 'My age is 15 years and 3 months and 3 days.' '' His inability to interpret basic social cues results in great moments of deadpan comedy, with strangers as well as with his patient, long-suffering father.

MIDWAY through the book, Christopher's quest for the dog's murderer becomes a search for his mother, who his father has told him is dead. His solo journey from Swindon to London is, for him, a terrifying leap into the unknown, as suspenseful and harrowing as anything in Conan Doyle[[4]](#footnote-4). He literally sees everything around him and is unable to edit the onslaught of sensory data in a new environment. And he is afraid of strangers and ill equipped to ask for their help.

Christopher's book seemingly has a nice tidy ending, as he would have wished -- horrified as he is of indeterminacy[[5]](#footnote-5). But this tidiness is an illusion, as the gulf[[6]](#footnote-6) between Christopher and his parents, between Christopher and the rest of us, remains immense and mysterious. And that gulf is ultimately the source of this novel's haunting impact. Christopher Boone is an unsolved mystery -- but he is certainly one of the strangest and most convincing characters in recent fiction.

1. accidentally [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. apparently/supposedly [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. beliefs [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, author of Sherlock Holmes novels [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Things that are uncertain, unpredictable, or cannot be defined [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. gap [↑](#footnote-ref-6)