

# Humor as a Method to be Oneself Despite the Stares: The Case of August in *Wonder*

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## Introduction

R.J. Palacio's *Wonder*, published in 2012, is about a ten-year-old boy, August "Auggie" Pullman. August has a facial deficiency,<sup>1</sup> which makes it quite challenging for him to enter the fifth grade of middle school. *Wonder* consists of multi-voiced narratives and August, his classmates, his sister, her boyfriend, and her best friend describe what happens during the period from August's entering school to his graduation. It is proof of its popularity that *Wonder* has been translated in over 40 languages.<sup>2</sup> In Japan, the first edition of its translation was published on July 20, 2015, and the ninth edition was published on May 20, 2016,<sup>3</sup> which also proves the dramatic rise in popularity of the novel.

In the first chapter, titled "Ordinary," August opines on the definition of "ordinary." The very beginning of August's narrative starts as follows:

I know I'm not an ordinary ten-year-old kid. I mean, sure, I do ordinary things. I eat ice cream. I ride my bike. I play ball. I have an

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Xbox. Stuff like that makes me ordinary. I guess. And I feel ordinary. Inside. But I know ordinary kids don't make other ordinary kids run away screaming in playgrounds. I know ordinary kids don't get started at wherever they go. . . . Here's what I think: the only reason I'm not ordinary is that no one else sees me that way. (3)<sup>4</sup>

August unconsciously associates “ordinary things” with what he consumes and plays with, such as ice cream, a bike, a ball, and an Xbox, which resonates with the following view of Rosemarie Garland-Thomson:

Now The Gap, Brooks Brothers, Aveda, and aesthetic surgery clinics produce a common appearance, even as they promise distinction. Industrialization has standardized our appearance with ready-made clothes and a mass-produced material environment; consumer culture urges brands, styles, body shapes, and even skin colors upon us. . . . So while the consumerist rhetoric of choice, individualism, nonconformity, and diversity prattles about being yourself, the swift current of late modernity sweeps us all toward sameness. . . . [W]e are urged to become incarnations of the “average man.” (*Staring* 34-35)

To August, the standard for judging whether someone is “ordinary” is the person's appearance, which represents the values of today's society: We should not be a staree.<sup>5</sup>

This ten-year-old boy's monologue prompts us to reflect on the definition of disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was introduced in 1990 and acknowledges that “disability depends upon perception and subjective judgment rather than on objective bodily states.” (Garland-Thomson, *Extraordinary Bodies* 6). According to his own subjective judgement, August is ordinary: He says, “I think the only person in the

world who realizes how ordinary I am is me” (3). At the same time, he knows that everyone, including his own family, sees him “as extraordinary” (3). In her study, Garland-Thomson criticizes “the accepted notions of physical disability as an absolute, inferior state and a personal misfortune,” and considers that disability is “a representation, a cultural interpretation of physical transformation or configuration, and a comparison of bodies that structures social relations and institutions” (*Extraordinary Bodies* 6).

The purpose of this article is to show how *Wonder* deconstructs ableist norms’ notion of disability through friendship. Lisa M. Tillmann-Healy refers to general understanding of friendship as follows: “Unlike romance and kinship, friendship in Western cultures lacks canonical status. In the United States, we tend to accord friendship second-class status. For example, we might say, ‘We’re *just* friends,’ to mean ‘We’re neither family, nor are we lovers’” (730). We shed a light especially on the friendship between August, with an unusual face, and his classmates, with no physical difficulties. Here it would be appropriate to cite Tillmann-Healy again:

When friendships do develop across social groups, the bonds take on political dimensions. Opportunities exist for dual consciousness-raising and for members of dominant groups (e.g., men, Euro-Americans, Christians, and heterosexuals) to serve as advocates for friends in target groups. As a result, those who are “just friends” can become *just* friends, interpersonal and political allies who seek personal growth, meaningful relationships, and social justice. (731)

August, with an atypical face, and typically faced friends, being only Jack and Summer at the beginning, are allied with each other and, even if they don’t consciously aim to, their friendship extends to the whole school and

changes their community,<sup>6</sup> which is a universal theme. This would be the very reason why *Wonder* is popular all over the world.

## **I. The Arbitrary Definition of Disability and the Act of Staring**

In the early stage of the narrative, August makes it clear that the reason he had not gone to school is not because of his unusual face. According to him, it was inevitable because he has had surgery two or three times every year, a total of 27 times since he was born, and he used to fall ill because of “medical mysteries that doctors never really figured out” (4). Now he has become strong enough not to have surgery for a couple of years, and his parents have decided to send him to school. His father prefers not to, saying to his wife, “So sending him off to middle school like a lamb to the slaughter . . .” (10). He anticipates that his son will be *slaughtered* by his classmates’ stares. Garland-Thomson refers to the fact that “[m]any stareable people pronounce children to be the most distressing starers, which is contrary to conventional wisdom about the charming innocence and inherent gentleness of children,” adding that “children about the ages of seven or eight are by far the most likely starers to taunt” (*Staring* 116). August is a ten-year-old boy. Through August’s father’s metaphorical and prophetic words before his son actually goes to school, Palacio suggests how cruel the act of staring can be.

Throughout the story, it is repeatedly mentioned that August is not a disabled person. Indeed, he has some difficulties in his daily life: although he had surgery to fix his cleft palate and to align his jaw, he still has a hole in the roof of his mouth, which makes it difficult for him to chew food (50); he

has to wear hearing aids, which are specially tailored to him because he doesn't have outer ears (211-212). However, he has no problem with his daily life, and people close to him do not regard him as what is called the handicapped or the disabled. For example, when August insists quitting school, confessing his suffering at school, his sister, Via, encourages him, saying, "The point is we all have to put up with the bad days. Now, unless you want to be treated like a baby the rest of your life, or like a kid with special needs, you just have to suck it up and go" (115); when August's classmate Julian's mother emails the middle-school director, Mr. Tushman, to accuse him of letting August into Beecher Prep School, which is not an inclusion school, he emails her back, saying, "[P]lease note that [August] does not have special needs. He is neither disabled, handicapped, nor developmentally delayed in any way" (163); when his best friend Jack hears that Julian's mother pushes Beecher Prep to review August's application, he says, "That's just stupid. Auggie doesn't have special needs" (171).

The only reason why August is excluded from others is his atypical face, which he himself cannot explain, only to say "man-di-bu-lo-facial dys-os-tosis" (129). More correctly, the way people look at him creates a barrier around him. On the first day of the new semester, every student stares at August. In the midst of his classmates' stares, he describes his thoughts, saying, "I could tell I was being stared at without even looking up. I knew that people were nudging each other, watching me out of the corners of their eyes. I thought I was used to those kinds of stares by now, but I guess I wasn't" (49-50). Being stared at persistently by the whole school, August confesses as follows:

[B]eing at school was awful in the beginning. Every new class I had

was like a new chance for kids to “not stare” at me. They would sneak peeks at me from behind their notebooks or when they thought I wasn’t looking. They would take the longest way around me to avoid bumping into me in any way, like I had some germ they could catch, like my face was contagious. (61)

The act of staring goes too far, and the students start a “game”: “Anyone who accidentally touches August has only thirty seconds to wash their hands or find hand sanitizer before they catch the Plague” (120). Not only out of curiosity but also out of a false sense of “self-protection,” those students are keen to watch August, but do not want to be touched by him nor touch him accidentally. In a particular community of the school, August is barred from it by those who belong to it. The students’ (and sometimes their parents’) attitudes against August show that perceived disability is not a fact but a social construct. This is a very tough situation for the ten-year-old boy but, probably unconsciously, he learns to laugh off the pain, as we discuss in the third section of this article.

Among all of our body parts, the face tends to be the primary mode of perceiving others because it is the first of the visible body parts that catches the eye. Garland-Thomson considers, “The sight of an unexpected body—that is to say, a body that does not conform to our expectations for an ordinary body—is compelling because it disorders expectations” (*Staring* 37). Further, she analyzes, “our faces are the most particularized and finely read part of our bodies, facial legibility rests upon a narrow set of expectations and tolerates a limited range of variations. . . . The atypical face is a failed face, perhaps an improperly human, irrationally organized face” (*Staring* 104). August partially understands others’ reaction, saying, “I’m not

saying they were doing any of these things in a mean way, by the way: not once did any kid laugh or make noises or do anything like that. They were just being normal dumb kids. I know that. I kind of wanted to tell them that. Like, it's okay, I know I'm weird-looking, take a look, I don't bite" (62). Still, as the staree, it is "awful" for him to be at school (61).

Even though August usually keeps his head down to protect himself from others' stares, he is observant of how people look at him, which suggests how he has been under people's scrutiny for so long. When he first sees Mrs. Garcia at school, he never misses the subtle movement of her eyes: "Then that thing happened that I've seen happen a million times before. When I looked up at her, Mrs. Garcia's eyes dropped for a second. It was so fast no one else would have noticed, since the rest of her face stayed exactly the same" (17); when his future class mates Charlotte, Julian, and Jack guide him around school before the new semester, as requested by Mr. Tushman, August clearly differentiates each of their ways to look at him. He describes his first encounter with them as follows: As for Charlotte, she "really didn't look at me much" (27). He noticed Julian "staring at [him] out of the corner of his eye," which he knows people often do with him (27). These are the very attitudes which Erving Goffman suggests is generally considered to be "more proper in most situations" and calls "civil inattention" (84). However, Palacio depicts how both acts of staring and pretending not to stare hurt a person with unorthodox physical features through August's confession of his painful feelings.

## II. The Multi-faceted Act of Looking

Even though people's acts of staring torment August in most parts of

*Wonder*, Palacio also shows us a positive aspect of the act of looking at others in the broader sense. Here, let us focus on the first interaction between August and Jack. In contrast with those people who either stare or pretend not to stare, Jack, who first did not want to be a volunteer to guide him when being asked by Mr. Tushman, exchanges looks with August, who describes the moment as follows: “He held the double doors open for me, and as I passed by, he looked at me right in the face, kind of daring me to look back at him, which I did. Then I actually smiled” (29). Indeed, August is a target of people’s stares in most of the cases, but his narrative itself proves that he is actually no less the starrer than the staree. If not, he would not be able to describe the starers’ minute attitudes as mentioned above. The difference between him seeing Jack and the other students is accounted by whether he meets their eyes or not. When August directly looks at Jack—face-to-face—he feels as though he has communicated with him without using words.

The thing is, because of the way my face is, people who don’t know me very well don’t always get that I’m smiling. My mouth doesn’t go up at the corners the way other people’s mouths do. It just goes straight across my face. But somehow Jack Will got that I had smiled at him. And he smiled back (29-30).

Through August and Jack’s first encounter,<sup>7</sup> Palacio shows that the act of looking does not always hurt people and it is necessary for understanding each other’s real feelings.

Jack learns justice through his friendship with August. On the day of Halloween, talking with Julian and a couple of others, Jack says, “[I]f I looked like [August], seriously, I think that I’d kill myself,” and continues, “I

can't imagine looking in the mirror every day and seeing myself like that. It would be too awful. And getting stared at all the time" (77). August happens to be there and is extremely shocked by his supposed-to-be best friend's words. Later, Jack himself reflects on this moment but only to be unable to comprehend why he said so. However, he instantly realizes how cruel his words were. His tremendous repentance becomes a driving force for Jack to pursue justice. When Julian calls August "that freak" (154), Jack punches the former in the mouth without considering the consequences. He does it instinctively for August. While he is suspended from school because of the act, he apologizes to August for his mean words. Replying to August's message to inquire why he punched Julian, Jack says, "he's a jerk. but I was a jerk too. really really really sorry for wat I said dude, Ok? can we b frenz agen?" (sic, 166). He summons up the courage to admit his fault and tries to reconstruct his friendship with August out of his own volition. Mark Anthony Castrodale and Daniel Zingaro mention that research on friendship between able-bodied and disabled persons often represents the latter as "fortunate receivers of friendship from kind, able-bodied friendship givers," and that this kind of friendship encourages the disabled to "overcome their lacking, problematic, socially deficient bodies and minds." In contrast, the friendship between August and Jack in *Wonder* is based on equality and reciprocity. It is not pity that urges Jack to be friends with August. Jack himself thinks August is his best friend: "[I]f all the guys in the fifth grade were lined up against a wall and I got to choose anyone I wanted to hang out with, I would choose August" (143). Through their relationship, Jack learns to look at an individual's personality and loyalty, not his appearance, and August learns to say frankly what he wants to say, not demeaning

himself, and generosity. Palacio's description of the friendship between August and Jack coincides with William K. Rawlins' study of childhood friendships:

9 and 10 year olds become fairly adept at inferring the psychological dispositions and attitudes of others, they come to understand that often persons can in turn infer the child's own personal traits and motivations. That is, they realize that just as they are able to think about others, their own behaviors and thoughts can become the objects of others' thoughts and evaluations. . . . Such perspective-taking ability is necessary for children to pursue a "two-way" approach to friendship, whereby the friends coordinate and adjust their actions in an attempt to fulfill or reconcile each other's expectations, rather than either friend simply assuming that the other should live up to his/her own standards. (31)

*Wonder* consists of multi-voiced narration, which contributes to describe August and his life objectively, and, with a panoramic view of the whole narrative, we notice that all the narrators want to be looked at by others. For example, Justin, who is dating August's sister Via, says he likes her family who happily talk to him face-to-face, and comparatively describes his own parents with words such as "underprotective," "neglectful," "self-involved," and "lame," adding that his brother "barely knows [he] exist[s]" (192); Via's best friend Miranda is sent to a summer camp by her mother so that she does not have to see her around and to be alone after her divorce. To attract others' attention, Miranda lies at the camp that she has "a little brother who was deformed" and changes her appearance to make herself look more flashy (237). Because of this lie and the change in appearance, it

becomes difficult for her to get along with Via, but they always look at each other even though their gazes miss each other's eyes. In other words, she is always anxious about being in Via's sight, and shows her extreme joy when she talks with August, Via, and their parents and knows that they care about her.

Via is the most eager person to be looked at among all these narrators. She is regarded as "the most understanding little girl in the world" (82) because she never complains to her parents or bothers them, trying to figure things out on her own. She knows her parents are busy taking care of August, confessing, "My worst day, worst fall, worst headache, worst bruise, worst camp, worst mean thing anyone could say has always been nothing compared to what August has gone through. This isn't me being noble, by the way: it's just the way I know it is" (83). However, she misses the old days when "[e]veryone's looking at [her]" (84) before August was born. It is her grandmother's words that sustains her. One day, her grandmother confesses a secret that she loves Via "more than anyone else in the world" (87), and continues to say, "I love Auggie very, very much . . . But he has many angels looking out for him already, Via. And I want you to know that you have *me* looking out for *you*. Okay, *menina querida*? I want you to know that you are a number one for me" (87). Her boyfriend, Justin, also watches over her: "olivia reminds me of a bird sometimes, how her feathers get all ruffled when she's mad. and when she's fragile like this, she's a little lost bird looking for its nest. so I give her my wing to hide under" (sic, 203).

In *Wonder*, on one hand, Palacio describes how cruel our eyes can be against those who have atypical physical features, and, on the other hand, she describes how all people need to be looked at with compassion. Looking

at someone can be caring about them. This point is represented in a passage which is cited by Mr. Tushman from a novel at the graduation ceremony. He introduces a scene where a small gesture of a classmate helps the main character Joseph: “It was at moments such as these that Joseph recognized the face of God in human form. It glimmered in their kindness to him, it glowed in their keenness, it hinted in their caring, indeed it caressed in their *gaze*” (300, emphasis mine). Here, it may be added that racial physical characteristics are hardly mentioned in *Wonder*. Via explains that both sides of her father’s family are Jews from Russia and Poland and that her mother’s side is from Brazil (103), but this is only to discuss August’s genetic issues. August notices that Summer is biracial (127) when he sees her father’s photo, but there is no further mention of it. Except for those instances, nobody mentions each other’s racial features,<sup>8</sup> which supposedly implies that it is nonsense to look at what is visible: What we should look at is inside. In this way, even though what makes August suffer is people’s stares, which is a central issue in *Wonder*, Palacio shows us the multi-faceted meaning of humans’ act of looking.

### **III. Humor as a Method of Communication**

One of the most attractive features of August is that he has a sense of humor. Summer, who is the first one who has lunch with August at Beecher Prep, admits that she “sat with [August] that first day because [she] felt sorry for him” (119), but her narrative continues as follows: “I should also say that I don’t really feel sorry for him anymore. That might have been what made me sit down with him the first time, but it’s not why I keep sitting down with him. I keep sitting down with him because he is fun”

(120). Jack is also attracted to August's humorous personality: "[H]e's actually a really cool dude. I mean, he's pretty funny. Like, the teacher will say something and August will whisper something funny to me that no one else hears and totally make me crack up" (142). August's father is also a funny person, as he says, "Dad always made everyone laugh" (13), and he seems to have inherited his father's sense of humor. However, while his father's jokes are basically anecdotes, for example about a professor of his college (13) or how he took in an abandoned dog (191-192), August's jokes often refer to himself. Hereafter, we will discuss how August uses humor as a trope to overcome or come to terms with others' responses toward his unusual face, giving specific examples.

First, his humor erases the difference between typically faced people and atypically faced himself. One day, an eighth grader bumps into August and Jack at the bottom of the stairs and unintentionally knocks over August. While helping August to his feet, he sees his face and shouts, "Whoa!" and runs away (63). August does not lament this but cracks up with Jack, mimicking the eighth grader's astonished face. They laugh so hard that their teacher asks them to settle down. However, they do not stop and continue their conversation:

"Are you always going to look this way, August? I mean, can't you get plastic surgery or something?"

I smiled and pointed to my face. "Hello? This *is* after plastic surgery!"

Jack clapped his hand over his forehead and started laughing hysterically.

"Dude, you should sue your doctor!" he answered between giggles.

This time the two of us were laughing so much we couldn't stop, even after Mr. Roche came over and made us both switch chairs with the kids next to us. (64)

August associates his atypical face with a "normal" face after failed plastic surgery, which subverts ableist notions of "what is generally called facial deformity or disfigurement" (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 105). At this point, August's wit is similar to disability humor<sup>9</sup> in terms of "suggesting ways that disabled people are 'able' and not hindered by disability and/or suggesting ways that TAB [temporarily able-bodied] individuals may be physically or socially 'disabled' in certain situations" (Milbrodt). Disability scholars have discussed the importance of humor from various perspectives, and one of the most important characteristics of disability humor is that the disabled "makes jokes about disabling encounters and environments, not disabled people" according to Tom Shakespeare (52).

Second, August's humor opens "a space for dialogue" about "the commonalities we share" (Reid, Stoughton, and Smith 639). The citation from the scene when Summer and August are talking about reincarnation is a good example:

"But they don't come back looking the same," he said. "I mean, they look completely different when they come back, right?"

"Oh yeah," I answered. "Your soul stays the same but everything else is different."

"I like that," he said, nodding a lot. "I really like that, Summer. That means in my next life I won't be stuck with this face."

He pointed to his face when he said that and batted his eyes, which made me laugh.

“I guess not.” I shrugged.

“Hey, I might even be handsome!” he said, smiling. “That would be so awesome, wouldn’t it? I could come back and be this good-looking dude and be super buff and super tall.”

I laughed again. He was such a good sport about himself. That’s one of the things I like the most about Auggie. (129)

August talks about the afterlife in a funny way but, witnessing how he suffers due to his atypical face before this scene, some readers might guess it is not a joke but rather his real hope to be reincarnated with a good appearance. Still, we should not miss that August is proud of making Summer laugh. Summer describes how their conversation continued as follows: “‘You’re funny, Auggie,’ I said. / ‘Yes, I am,’ he said proudly. ‘I am cool beans.’” (130). The act of making others laugh allows him to suggest that his unorthodox face is “not important since he is accustomed to this way of being” (Milbrodt) and he “emerge[s] as [one of the] capable people who find life’s predicaments amusing” (Reid, Stoughton, and Smith 635).

What should be noted here is that the humor is dialogic. The success of disability humor depends on both the teller and the audience. Teresa Milbrodt suggests that disability humor “can be read in numerous ways, and it is easy to interpret a joke in a manner not intended by the joke-teller,” emphasizing that the key to disability humor lies in having “an audience who understands the teller’s perspective and world view and thereby ‘gets’ the joke.”<sup>10</sup> The fact that August says funny things only to Jack and Summer for more than the first half of his narrative in *Wonder* suggests that August either instinctively or unconsciously sorts out the persons who understand his humor.

However, Palacio vividly describes the scene when August jokes with other students who used to show abhorrence and keep a distance from him, and this is an example of the third characteristic of August's humor: Borrowing Milbrodt's words, he positions himself "as being in control of the situation through giving others permission to laugh at" his physical features because he considers them to be "no big deal" in spite of the ableist norm.

[T]he other day I saw Maya writing a note to Ellie on a piece of Uglydoll stationery, and I don't know why, but I just kind of randomly said: "Did you know the guy who created the Uglydolls based them on me?"

Maya looked at me with her eyes wide open like she totally believed me. Then, when she realized I was only kidding, she thought it was the funniest thing in the world.

"You are so funny, August!" she said, and then she told Ellie and some of the other girls what I had just said, and they all thought it was funny, too. Like at first they were shocked, but then when they saw I was laughing about it, they knew it was okay to laugh about it, too. (209-210)

As Milbrodt writes, "[t]he joke makes space for a moment of reflection that may sensitize TABs to the comedy of crip [sic] humor, and potentially allow them to see disability as merely another form of embodiment." Not in narcissism or self-pity, August transforms his unusual face into "a generative arena from which creative interpersonal skills and deep wells of sustenance emerge" (Garland-Thomson, *Staring* 108). After amusing Maya, August's humorous character spreads to other students, which leads to the dramatic episode where the classmates, who used to avoid August and would not

even talk to him, join forces to save him from their seniors who assault him while camping. Without humor, August might not be “one of them” (282).

Of course, sometimes August laughs with his friends and family without using his face but, inserting those types of jokes considered above in detail and at the right time in the whole narrative, Palacio shows another facet of staring interaction. As mentioned in the first section of this article, August knows most of the students at Beecher Prep cannot help but stare at him, as Garland-Thomson says, “We cannot, even when we try, ignore compelling visual stimuli” (*Staring* 17), and then he needs to develop some methods to present his true self, which is obstructed by his unusual face, to the starers. Garland-Thomson says, “To enlist the potency bestowed by someone’s fear and convert it into a form of personal authority inflected by either generosity or command can enlarge the self in ways that are psychologically beneficial and socially effective” (*Staring* 107). August suffers from being stared at but, using it to his advantage, he develops creative interpersonal skills.

## Conclusion

August’s family is full of love and laughter, and he is protected by family members in their own way. However, they notice it is time for ten-year-old August to grow up. This is why his parents decide to send him school to face “his reality” (10), as his sister also says, “[H]e needs to grow up now. We need to let him, help him, make him grow up. Here’s what I think: we’ve all spent so much time trying to make August think he’s normal that he actually thinks he is normal. And the problem is, he’s not” (90). These family members’ opinions conflict with August’s idea: “I think the only person in the world who realized how *ordinary* I am is me” (3, emphasis mine). To

August, his face does not represent his real self, which is why he repeats describing himself to be ordinary.

Here, let us turn our eyes to what he says about himself after experiencing many things in one year at Beecher Prep and unexpectedly receives “the Henry Ward Beecher medal to honor students who have been notable or exemplary in certain areas throughout the school year” (303) at the graduation ceremony:

I wasn't even sure why I was getting this medal, really.

No, that's not true. I knew why.

It's like people you see sometimes, and you can't imagine what it would be like to be that person, whether it's somebody in a wheelchair or somebody who can't talk. Only, I know that I'm that person to other people, maybe to every single person in that whole auditorium.

To me, though, I'm just me. An *ordinary* kid. (306, emphasis mine)

In this monologue, August uses the same word “ordinary” to describe himself as before entering Beecher Prep. It seems that it is his community that has been changed and has overcome prejudice. That is because facing August gives them a chance to realize that disability is something socially constructed. It is nonsense for them to focus their eyes only on his appearance, but they should see through the appearance to know what he is. As we have discussed reciprocity, however, August must also have been changed, facing and accepting the reality. Above all, friendships, which are different from sibling and parent-child relationships, gives him a chance for self-development. *Wonder* is a happy-ending story, but it doesn't say what will happen next to August as Palacio herself mentions in her next novel, *Auggie & Me: Three Wonder Stories*. Yet, that can be said of all people, not

only of August with an unusual face.

## Notes

1. August's sister tells us that genetic counselors explained that he has "what seemed to be a 'previously unknown type of mandibulofacial dysostosis caused by an autosomal recessive mutation in the *TCOF1* gene, which is located on chromosome 5, complicated by a hemifacial macrosomia characteristic of OAV spectrum.'" (104).

2. Information about translations of the book was retrieved from the website of *Wonder*.

3. Information about the Japanese translation relates to the translation published by Holp Shuppan.

4. Citations of *Wonder* are from Palacio (2012), and the page numbers of this edition are included parenthetically in the text.

5. In her study of the act of staring, *Staring* (2009), Garland-Thomson calls the subject of staring "the starrer" and the object "the staree." These words will be used in this article.

6. Elizabeth A. Wheeler regards Beecher Prep as "a microcosm of a changing society," and *Wonder* represents "how the public presence of people with disabilities benefits a whole society" (335). Her encompassing analysis is suggestive, and this article narrows the focus to the interaction of looking and August's humor.

7. Later, Jack confesses that he saw August when he was about five or six years old and that he was so shocked by his atypical face. He says, "It's hard not to sneak a second look. It's hard to act normal when you see him" (138). Palacio seems to try to describe her characters as realistically as

possible even though Jack's attitude toward August changes a little too quickly in his second encounter with him after only about four or five years. Jack is not a saint like Helen, who supports her cousin Katy when she becomes unable to walk in *What Katy Did* (1872).

8. There are illustrations of each narrator on the first page of each narrative, which also blur their racial identity. Those illustrations hardly show the characters' physical features even though we can see their hairstyles and little things they wear.

9. This article follows the study of Reid, Stoughton, and Smith, in which the term "disability humor" is used to mean "any humor that centers disability or is offered by disabled persons." They clearly differentiate disability humor from "disabling humor," which is "denigrating" (631).

10. Reid, Stoughton, and Smith also emphasize the relationship between the person who tells a joke and his/her audience: "[D]isability humor is indeed a floating signifier that depends not only on jokes and anecdotes *per se*, but also on the nature of listeners' responses. Initially, everything depends on the assumptions and attitudes audience members bring, but it is possible that humor could change the assumptions they leave with" (641).

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