

Review

Julie Dachez (author) & Mademoiselle Caroline (illustrator). 2020.
Invisible Differences: A Story of Asperger's, Adulthood, and Living a Life in Full Color. Translated by E. Gauvin. Oni Press. \$19.95, paperback.

JJ Pionke

Invisible Differences: A Story of Asperger's, Adulthood, and Living a Life in Full Color is a graphic novel that relates the story of a young woman's journey to an Asperger's diagnosis. Originally written in French, the book was translated by Edward Gauvin for author Julie Dachez and illustrator Mademoiselle Caroline. In this thinly veiled autobiography of Dachez, the story follows Marguerite as she goes about her daily business, which largely consists of going to and from work, as well as her actual job. We also learn the difficulties she faces with noise, interacting with people socially, and her relationship with her boyfriend.

The first half of the book is in black and white with the occasional color here and there. It is the other half that blooms with color once Marguerite has a diagnosis, meets people who also have a diagnosis of Asperger's, and starts to adjust her life in a way that fits her better. Throughout the entire book, Marguerite's sneakers are red, symbolizing her individuality and uniqueness in contrast to the people around her, who are typically only in black, white, and grey. Color is used initially to highlight distressing conversations or situations. Eventually, color comes to focus on Marguerite's embracing of her diagnosis and living her life in ways that best suit her and make her happy. Drawn and colored in the classic French bande dessinée style, colors are largely bold and in primary colors with some shading as needed to emphasize a point. For example, on page 15, we see Marguerite sitting at her desk at work. There are a series of panels that depict office noises such as computer keys being tapped, people talking, and so on. The background color starts as white at the top of the page, but gets progressively shaded from a light red to a dark red to help symbolize that all of the noise is bothering Marguerite intensely. Besides the use of color to help us understand how Marguerite navigates the world, there is also the narrator.

While a narrator is a standard part of many stories, the narrator directly addressing the reader is not as typical. On page 64, the narrator addresses the reader directly to make it clear that we have been witness to various aspects of Marguerite's life and her difficulty navigating the life she is, up until that moment, currently living. The narrator tells us, "You might be getting tired of these repetitive panels, but Marguerite finds this routine reassuring. Passing by her bookstore, then the bakery, the streets, the stairwell...It's all about rituals." More than just addressing us, the narrator also comments on the physical form of the narrative in this example by calling out the comic strip panels. The narrator helps us make the connection between Marguerite's differences, as in human interactions, her eventual diagnosis, and the bande dessinée form.

One of the more interesting aspects of the book is that the back matter examines autism and Asperger's diagnoses in France. There's also discussion of why either condition is not diagnosed as readily as it is in the United States. I highly recommend this graphic novel, not just for its

contribution to graphic medicine depicting Asperger's in translation, but because at its heart, the graphic novel is both the story of one person and an educational tool for the reader to understand Asperger's more readily.