



Disability Identity and Autism Acceptance in *The Residence*

Sonya Freeman Loftis

Abstract. Drawing on the idea of the detective as an isolated and lonely genius, Netflix's *The Residence* (2025) features a detective figure with autistic traits. *The Residence* subtly explores issues of disability pride, acceptance, and community while hinting at various ways in which its autistic detective figure grapples with ableist discrimination.

The neurodivergent detective is perhaps the most popular of fictional autism tropes.¹ Influenced by Sherlock Holmes as a potentially autistic ancestor, such figures are often imbued with autistic traits: attention to detail, powerful memory, the ability to think outside of the neurotypical box.² They also sometimes struggle with stereotypically autistic challenges, such as difficulty fitting in socially, communicating with colleagues, or working as part of a team. The idea of the detective as an isolated and lonely genius fits with cultural stereotypes of autistic people. Although most autistic people do not have genius-level IQs, the figure of the autistic savant has been so popular that it permeates the trope of the neurodivergent detective.³ Susannah B. Mintz writes that “interest in the trope of disabled detection may . . . betray entrenched prejudice against impairment as a ‘burden,’ as an abnormality, an exotic defect or characterological quirk” (2). According to Mintz, disability and impairment in detective fiction often serve as “ornaments of the detective’s cognitive skill,” which “suggests that impairment works according to what disability scholars would call a prosthetic

Sonya Freeman Loftis, the M. Mitchell Endowed Chair of English at Morehouse College, focuses on disability studies and early modern literature, with particular attention to neurodiversity, autistic culture, and accessibility. She is the author of five books, including Shakespeare and Disability Studies (Oxford UP, 2021) and Imagining Autism: Fiction and Stereotypes on the Spectrum (Indiana UP, 2015). Her work has appeared in the Disability Studies Reader, Disability Studies Quarterly, Shakespeare Survey, and Shakespeare Bulletin. She is the series editor for Edinburgh Critical Studies in Early Modern Literature and Disability (Edinburgh UP), the disability studies editor for the Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature (Oxford UP), and the coeditor of Ought: The Journal of Autistic Culture.