nation, it becomes representative of something more (e.g. the memory of war).

In the introduction to this study, I referred to Draaisma's idea of a 'set of stereotypes', which could also be understood as a type. What I have dubbed 'the Autist' would therefore be the quintessential personification of this set. 'The Autist' as a stock character, on the other hand, would require a literary convention.[5] While I cannot rule out the possibility that such a stock character exists, I suggest that it would require an analysis of novels, movies, and tv series across different genres to generate a sample of adequate size. Any findings would then also have to considerably diverge from autists in real life. In other words, the stock character 'the Autist', per my definition, would necessarily incorporate a fictional element that makes it inherently literary while still alluding to autism stereotypes.

Autism Stereotypes

Autism activist Sonya Freeman Loftis explored the negative consequences of autism stereotypes based on the public assumption that Sherlock Holmes is on the spectrum.

> The claim that Conan Doyle's famous detective has Asperger's Syndrome is ubiquitous enough to appear in a variety of popular venues, and his diagnosis has been pursued by both fans and professionals; unfortunately, most of the discussions of Holmes's autistic traits present negative stereotypes as a part of their analysis, offering an extremely superficial and one-sided view of autism. (Loftis)

While I do not agree with this 'diagnosis', it is a prime example of how retrospective interpretation will make it come 'true' and textual evidence

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5   Technically, this refers to 'the fictional Autist', so as to emphasise their artificial nature.

is being overruled. Presently, the perception of Holmes as autistic is indicative of the public's understanding of autism. Loftis criticises that a large part of this 'diagnosis' is the attribution of negative stereotypes, such as autists being "emotionless, lacking in empathy, and [being] incapable of love" (Loftis). She also names characteristics of Holmes that supposedly justify his diagnosis, including him "having intense interests, struggling in the social sphere, and displaying unusual body language" (Loftis), which is indicative of her (stereotypical) understanding of autism.

However, she is most concerned with the implied criminality of Holmes:

> While these crime fighters and mystery-solvers may reassure majority audiences that the stereotypical autistic savant works for law and order rather than against it, many of these television shows maintain an ambiguous liminality between criminal and crime solver and develop an aura of mystery around characters with autistic traits. (Loftis)

This paints the following picture: autists are extraordinarily intelligent with specialised interests but unusual body language and social inabilities. Because they lack emotion, which makes them incapable of loving and being emphatic towards others, they could easily become criminal masterminds. Interestingly, Loftis cites instances that supposedly prove Holmes 'autism' but does not focus on contraindicative passages, thus reinforcing the idea. However, she does criticise how

> [a]mateur diagnoses based on popular stereotypes foster a one-dimensional way of thinking about people on the spectrum. In addition, such informal diagnosis may lead people to think that the experience of being autistic can be reduced to a list of criteria in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. For those who self-identify as autistic, being on the spectrum is not just a list of traits, but an entire person, an entire life experience. (Loftis, original highlighting)

I understand that Loftis is trying to make a point, however, the fact that being autistic is more than (or different from) a list of criteria in the DSM is simply stating that stereotypes are not accurate. Yet, everybody's lives are encompassed of more than the generalised assumptions others make about us; it is the pitfall of stereotypes. Secondly, the 'autistic detective' may have become a stock character, but it is certainly not a type, and it is also not the only way autists are represented in fiction. Stereotypes not only serve as 'sets of attributes' associated with a class of people, but they also make actions predictable. In fictional representations, there will necessarily be some hyperbole once a character's thematic components are foregrounded, because those characters are stylised. For example, I believe that this particular set of attributes to which Loftis referred, is closely linked to the character's function as a detective. Consequently, the cold-hearted and unapologetically reasonable (borderline criminal) character is a thematic exaggeration of the detective, not the autist. However, I understand her worries that such portrayals will be associated with autists by proxy (i.e. through family resemblance), which is why I believe it is important to create awareness for stereotypes and educate people on them.

That is not to say that stereotypes can simply be talked away. Other scholars have written about autism stereotypes (cf. Yergeau, Hacking, Bumiller) and identified five common characteristics attributed to autism portrayals:

i.   The autist as a *disabled person*
ii. The autist as a *genius*
iii. The autist as *childlike*
iv. The autist as a *robot/computer/machine*
v.   The autist as an *alien*

Perhaps these five stereotypes do not necessarily all have to be present. For example, Loftis's description would suggest a combination of 'genius' and 'robot'. On the other hand, they cannot exist on their own, or else the character would be representative of something else. I thus argue that these stereotypes form a set of characteristics that are presented in

the media and thus cause a character to be recognised as 'autistic' by the public discourse, independently of diagnostic criteria (cf. Chapter 6.1). While the 'Holmesian detective' is certainly more like a stock character, I am unsure whether the type 'autist' has already become canonical. For this to be true, it would have to be inherently stereotypical, i.e. hyperbolic in their teleological determination. In the end, this might be impossible to tell, especially without a discourse analysis.

A type is derived from real-world stereotypes but in literature, I expect stereotypes to manifest themselves in particular narratological features idiosyncratic to these portrayals, which also leaves room for interpretation. While the stereotypical assumptions selected are those commonly identified, I do not claim comprehensiveness. Contrary to Loftis, however, I do not expect the majority of laypeople to be acquainted with the diagnostic criteria given by the DSM. While stereotypes may be related to medical criteria, such as the above-mentioned characteristics 'intense interests', 'social difficulties', and 'unusual body language', I believe most people do not check their stereotypes against the DSM.

In the following, I will explore all five commonly found characteristics and identify aspects that allude to a certain stereotypical assumption. I will point out common associations, as well as consequences. These may, at times, appear superficial or uncritical. However, aspects such as one-dimensionality, stigmata, pragmatic competency, or a lack of Theory of Mind should be considered part of a brief sketch, an overview so to speak, of a larger picture that I will try to paint with my study. Therefore, the descriptions of these stereotypes will necessarily read more like bullet point lists rather than critical discussions.

i.   *Portraying Autism as a Disability*

Arguably, the term 'disability' is rather loaded and I am aware that autism is not so much considered a handicap within the autism community[6] (Hacking, "Humans, Aliens & Autism" 47). However, for some

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6   I will further discuss this notion in Chapter 5.3, under the aspects of normality and deviance, as well as disability studies.

individuals, autism presents itself as a serious obstacle to participating in society. While 'disabled' may be a generalised assumption made about all autists, it is the quintessential stereotype. Consequently, portraying autism makes it impossible to escape the legacy of 'disabled' characters. The latter has historically had a difficult standing. Disability studies have tried to create awareness of the fact that "disabled people are portrayed as 'other' against normative culture" (Donnelly). However, wholesome portrayals of disabilities remain rare and are "largely one dimensional" (Barnes 37). Instead, "(developmental) disabilities and other exceptionalities are often included in the larger sweep of multiculturalism" (Rozema 27). Put starkly, characters with disabilities are but means to an end of fulfilling a quota of political correctness. Ironically, studies have shown that "[m]ost of the portrayals were male and all of the illustrations depicted characters as European-American" (Dyches et al. 307). Researchers also found that "particular disabilities are considered more 'appropriate' for inclusion in children's picture books than other disabilities, just as polio and blindness were common disabilities included in classic texts" (Brenna 518). Currently, these include "autism, intellectual disability, Down syndrome, and Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder" (517).

When it comes to portraying disabilities, researchers criticised how often these portrayals feature static characters that "show no growth" (Dyches 313). Those with mental disabilities especially are usually not the main characters, do not develop, and only serve "as a catalyst for another character to change" (305), when "main or supporting characters without disabilities (learn) to accept or understand the individual with DD [Developmental Disability]" (315). Even if characters with disabilities contribute to their communities, they usually do so unintentionally (313). The same goes for special strengths, i.e. even if a character is mentioned to have a special strength, it is rarely used by the author "to contribute to the plot" (311). Vice versa, these abilities are sometimes used to 'justify' the worth of a character. Nevertheless, the character remains one-dimensional, its function is the allusion to political correctness. Visible physical handicaps are also often associated with crookedness, e.g. the one-legged pirate, the criminal who had his hand chopped off, or the

burnt supervillain. On the other hand, disabled characters are also portrayed as the victim of their own body, mind or surroundings, presenting "disability as stereotypically tragic and medicalized" (Woiak and Lang). Follow-up studies into young adult fiction have shown that nearly half of the portrayed characters with disabilities were victims of harassment (Dyches et al. 317) and "most were shown being dependent upon others" (315). As a reason for this, scholars suggested that "authors have not been able to envision a positive future for someone with a disability" (Brenna 515). The solution is often either 'cure' or 'kill' (515).

Autism, too, is presented as a family tragedy between the lines, or at the very least a burden to the parents whose child will never be 'normal' and possibly never live an independent life. This narrative reaches even further back than the beginnings of autism research; it is "the ancient myth of the changeling, the troll child substituted in the dead of night for an infant sleeping in his cot at home" (Hacking, "Humans, Aliens & Autism" 45). This coincides with developmental regression in autism, which occurs in about one-third of children with autism, causing them to lose previously acquired skills (Al Backer 23). Here, the story implies that parents had a normal child until it was 'stolen' away from them (50), leaving them with

> children who refuse to hug their parents, of children whose worlds are supposedly so impoverished that they spend their days spinning in circles, or flapping their hands, or screaming or self-injuring or resisting … . (Yergeau 3)

These children do not look different but have become "feral children" (Hacking 57). Consequently, the family is to be pitied, for they have lost their child and are now forced to spend an extraordinary amount of resources and strength on a child that may never grow up to live an independent life. This motif, of course, can be transferred to all parents/families living with a disabled relative. It is a sad reality that filicide occurs more often in families with disabled children, sometimes even considered 'altruistic' (Palermo 47).

The following aspects allude to the stereotype *'Disabled'* in autism portrayals:

- **Othering**: Characters are portrayed as differing from the norm in their ability to fit in and participate in society. Their ostracization often leads to instances of harassment and bullying.
- **Dependency**: Characters are portrayed as dependent on others for everyday tasks while their peers are self-reliant.
- **One-Dimensional**: Characters are static, and their thematic compound is more pronounced while their mimetic dimension is neglected. These characters mostly function as stepping-stones for others.
- **Tragic**: Here, disability is portrayed as a burden to the family or even a tragedy from which they can only escape if the disabled member is 'cured' or 'killed'.

ii. *Portraying Autists as Geniuses*

The term genius is nowadays usually equated to extraordinary cognitive abilities in the fields of science or art, yet it remains a contested concept. In the context of autism stereotypes, however, it is associated with giftedness, e.g. mathematical abilities, playing an instrument virtuously, exceptional memory, etc. If a character solves mysteries or crimes, they are also usually associated with hyper-attentiveness and attention to detail, seeing clues that others miss. Here, the genial traits carry much of the synthetic dimensions, naturally contributing to the association of autism and crime-solving.

While genius is sometimes linked to high intelligence, it is also at times associated with mental illness. In literature, especially, it seems as if such abilities must necessarily be balanced out, with characters such as Dr. Jekyll, Frankenstein, Dupin, and of course, Sherlock Holmes pay-

ing a high price: Only Holmes is not killed by his genius[7], but they are all driven by their pursuits, ultimately becoming lonely workaholics. Arguably, there already exist literary conventions when it comes to pairing genius with flaws, such as a general association with eccentricity (the absent-minded professor, e.g. Jacques Paganel), criminal behaviour (the criminal mastermind, e.g. Moriarty), or simply madness (the mad scientist, e.g. Dr. Moreau). These individuals have in common that their genius and its associated downside bars them from participating in society. In autism portrayals, this genius could be seen as a counterbalance to the difficulties autistic individuals are faced with.

However, when considering the spectrum of autism as a whole, special abilities are an exception, not the rule. Interestingly, Draaisma found that in media portrayals "[t]here are two options for an autistic person; "[i]t is either diminished capacity or superhuman capacity, but nothing in between" (1478). This stereotypical assumption leads to autists being associated with genial abilities in real life, even to the point where their diagnosis is questioned if they do not meet these expectations (1478). Portraying autists as stereotypically gifted is therefore "a harmful divergence between the general image of autism and the clinical reality" (1476). This stereotype can be considered a form of literary stylisation of autism portrayals and could hint toward the formation of a type or a stock character. Here, portrayals have created unrealistic expectations because readers are unable to differentiate the thematic and synthetic (or perhaps mimetic) components of a character, thus equating autism with giftedness.

> In shutting out low-functioning adolescents, young adult fiction fails to recognize that many of the millions affected by ASD will never live independently, never memorize vast quantities of information, never look up words in the dictionary, never solve crimes or sleuth their way through elaborate puzzles. (Rozema 29)

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7   Although technically only because Doyle revived him when pressured by fans. Otherwise, he would have died to vanquish Moriarty, his intellectual equal but also a criminal mastermind.

Arguably, these 'low-functioning'[8] characters could not fulfil the same function in a plot as an (autistic) genius but would be somewhat interchangeable with any character that portrays a mental disability (Draaisma 1478).

The following aspects allude to the stereotype *'Genius'* in autism portrayals:

- **Gifted**: Characters are portrayed as having extraordinary abilities which 'prove their worth' and balance out any shortcomings their autism may cause.
- **Hyperattentive**: Especially within the detective genre, autists are portrayed as having excellent memory, attention to detail, and heightened senses, which allows them to solve crimes and mysteries better than others do.

This stereotype is often combined with the stereotypes 'Disabled' and 'Robot'. Moreover, characters with extraordinary talents are also sometimes referred to as 'savants', however, this may be misleading.[9]

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8   See also Chapter 6.3.

9   The combination of autism and genius is sometimes referred to as 'savant'. However, this may be misleading. The savant is a distinct overlap of the stereotypes 'Disabled' and 'Genius'. The savant-syndrome is a "condition in which people with various developmental disabilities, including autism, possess astonishing islands of ability and brilliance […]" (Treffert and Wallace 78). It is commonly associated with autism since it is "seen in about one in 10 people with autism" (78). Savants usually have narrow skills, e.g. calendar calculating or playing the piano, in combination "with IQs between 40 and 70" (78). Similarly, a savant "may have extensive language ability – that is, the capacity to memorize many languages but not to understand them" (80) because their skills are often linked to outstanding memory but lack further comprehension. Thus, while savants are considered to be on a spectrum of ability, too (80), they are also more likely to depend on others for their basic daily needs (78).

iii. *Portraying Autists as Childlike*

What I am referring to as 'childlike' essentially relates to inexperience, i.e. a lack of experience associated with innocence, naivety, and lack of knowledge when it comes to 'the real world'. In fact, the child narrator is a distinct stylistic device (see Chapter 7.4); however, the stereotype 'Childlike' refers to a set of associations that may also be linked to adult characters. In other words, while I expect a child to be childlike, such behaviour in adults leads to dissonance between my expectations and reality. Associations that I have subsumed under this stereotype, include truthfulness, literalness, a naïve approach to social interactions, and dependency on others. These are, of course, hyperbolic assumptions.[10]

A common saying assures that children tell the truth. Their literalness and their unawareness of social conventions allow for a greater degree of honesty than in any adult who has learned to 'deceive' others for the sake of politeness or conventional gestures. Since many autistics are portrayed with an inability to lie (Draaisma 1479) – and equally, an inability to detect lies – they are commonly associated with naivety. However, there is also a fine line between honesty and (perceived) rudeness; "opinions may be expressed forthrightly rather than in more subtle, socially acceptable indirect ways, leading to impressions of impoliteness, … or insensitivity" (Semino 151).

Closely linked to their honesty is their literalness, since for example irony can be considered a 'lie' if taken literally. This causes difficulties in "understanding irony, sarcasm, metaphor, and deceit" (Boorse et al.), much of which is used in everyday interaction (Draaisma 1479). Here, stereotypical expectations range from individuals being "terribly literal" (1478) to autism precluding them "from being rhetorical, much less a rhetorician" (Yergeau 5). However, aside from an assumed inability to converse, literalness and the inability to perceive pragmatic force make a person appear naïve and at times exasperating partners in conversation,

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10   One might argue, portrayals used for this work range in age from 11 to 16, thus there is a degree of immaturity that I would naturally expect in a character, given their age. I return to this conflict in Chapter 7.3.

for they will correct others, need more explanations, take jokes literally, etc. Reactions by others may be patronising if the character appears too innocent, naïve, and gullible 'for their age'. Quite often, these individuals will then also be considered either less mentally capable or pedantic. The former, especially, contrasts starkly with the genial traits, thus again balancing out abilities with flaws.

In reality, many autistic individuals can learn to compensate for or camouflage one or more of their deficits, both consciously and unconsciously (Hull, Petrides, and Mandy 309). In fact, autistic individuals may have different symptoms at different stages of their lives (Kissgen and Schleiffer 37) and even 'outgrow' their diagnosis (35) in that they no longer fulfil (current) diagnostic criteria. Therefore, change and progression should be considered part of this stereotype, even though it is counteractive.

The following aspects allude to the stereotype '*Childlike*' in autism portrayals:

- **Naivety**: Characters are portrayed as having an innocent perspective which puts them at a disadvantage. They lack 'street smart' and social finesse, as well as essential skills for navigating society, such as riding a bus or making a phone call.
- **Honesty**: These characters are very honest, to the point where they are unable to lie, which will cause difficulties in relationships.
- **Literalness**: Because characters lack pragmatic competence, they are often unable to grasp the full meaning of utterances, especially where sarcasm, irony, or metaphors are deployed.
- **Patronising**: Characters tend to be patronised by others because they are perceived as (socially) incompetent or naïve.

In some cases, characters are portrayed as dynamic. They grow by overcoming some of their difficulties, e.g. by learning how to navigate social situations and developing new skills. In doing so, characters will actively reflect and change their standing in life and towards others, consequently forming new relationships or changing their future perspec-

tives. Here, the stereotype 'Childlike' is most pronounced at the beginning of the novel but its impact decreases.

iv.   *Portraying Autistics as Robots/Computers/Machines*

This last stereotype is perhaps the most commonly portrayed. It is linked to the "assumption that these individuals are closed off or devoid of emotions" (Van Hart 33) as well as their stereotypically assumed abilities (solving equations in their heads, reciting lists and numbers, remembering facts, etc.). The stereotype is another metaphor for explaining how the autistic brain apparently works.

As of now, robots, machines, and computers have no concept of emotions, language, or their own existence for that matter. Comparing autists to machines thus not only suggests that they have no emotions but also that they lack an understanding thereof. The idea is rooted in the concept of 'mind-blindness', a term that was coined by Simon Baron-Cohen. It is the theory that autists lack a Theory of Mind (ToM):

> Theory-of-mind refers to the ability to perceive mental functions in others. Mental functions include, on the one hand, products of thought (beliefs) such as views, opinions, convictions, and knowledge. On the other hand, these mental functions also refer to driving factors for action (desires) such as needs, wishes and intentions. (Kissgen and Schleiffer 30, own translation)[11]

Because it was theorised that autists lack a Theory of Mind completely, researchers have gone as far as to suggest that autists themselves do not have beliefs and desires. Furthermore, the term 'mind-blindness' implies a complete lack of awareness rather than a mere deficit, thus radicalising

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11   Als Theory-of-Mind wird die Fähigkeit, mentale Funktionen bei anderen wahrzunehmen, bezeichnet. Zu den mentalen Funktionen zählen einerseits Produkte des Denkens (beliefs) wie Ansichten, Meinungen, Überzeugungen und Wissensbestände. Andererseits beziehen sich diese mentalen Funktionen auch auf Antriebsfaktoren für das Handeln (desires) wie Bedürfnisse, Wünsche und Intentionen. (Kissgen and Schleiffer 30)

the diagnosis. It is more than 'being blind' since the mind – our cognitive, emotional, and emphatic abilities – renders us human. Taking this away gives rise to the 'alien'- or 'robot'-theory. However, when German researchers replicated Baron-Cohen et al.'s study in 2002, they were unable to confirm the original results (Kissgen and Schleiffer 31). Other researchers, too, have found that although it may "not kick in as early, or as well, for most autistic children" (54), those with a normal IQ are likely to develop a Theory of Mind at some stage. Testing for Theory of Mind deficits, as well as explaining autism symptoms by it, is highly contested in the autism community since it is historically loaded. Autism activists especially emphasise the damage done by insinuating that autistic individuals may be "mindblind egocentrists" (Yergeau 16).

On the other hand, it has been argued that "ordinary people cannot see what an autistic boy is doing when [...] he is furiously flapping his hands" (Hacking, "Humans, Aliens & Autism" 56). Here, the "instinctive neurotypical ways of interacting with other people do not enable us to look and see what the child is feeling" (56).

> At best, the feelings and emotions of the severely autistic must be inferred. We are not even confident of our inferences, not because we lack enough evidence, but because we may doubt that the concepts that have evolved over millennia for the description of neurotypicals are apt for the autistic life. (Hacking, "Humans, Aliens & Autism" 56)

The idea of 'mind-blindness' thus also fails to acknowledge that one does not actually know how the autistic brain works. What could be looked at as a fundamental communication barrier, where both sides struggle to understand each other, is all too often interpreted as a lack of understanding. Moreover, it has led to the notion of autistic individuals as rather shallow. Because they do not express emotions the same way neurotypicals might, it is assumed that they lack them altogether. Thus, they are "emotionally 'thin' children, who grow up to be 'thin' men and women, lacking a 'thick' emotional life" (Hacking, "Humans, Aliens & Autism" 56). These individuals, it appears, have no concept of deep emotions such as love. Thus, "[o]ther fictional personas appear, even when processing

emotions, to occupy a remarkably machine-like rather than human body (such as Commander Data from Star Trek)" (Bumiller 970). Computers and Robots were programmed to understand verbal or non-verbal input and process it by rules, which brings to mind the behaviouristic training programs that were developed for autistic individuals on the basis of conditioning (e.g. Applied Behaviour Analysis, see Chapter 6.4). Put starkly, their goal is to make autistic children appear 'normal'.

Another aspect commonly associated with robots is their predictability. If told to, a computer or a machine will repeat the same process over and over again, producing the same results without becoming bored or tired. Similarly, characters are often portrayed as having strict routines and patterns, dressing the same every day, eating the same food, etc.[12] This, too, makes them appear predictable and boring, if not limited in their ability to adapt to change. What partly feeds into this stereotype is their hypersensitivity (see stereotype 'Genius'). Autists tend to favour routines and order to keep the incoming information at bay, thus preventing sensitive overload. However, if this is not stated as a reason, the reader will more likely conclude that the character is single-minded, obsessive, and as such rather boring. The same effect is created if a character is portrayed as emotionless, with the reader assuming a lack of empathy.

On a related note, comparing autists to humanoid robots also carries an eerie notion. Machines coming alive is an idea that was already featured in ancient Greek mythology (Pygmalion), and of course as a gothic element. Sigmund Freud uses E.T.A. Hoffmann to explain the uncanniness of the automaton Olympia, "who is to all appearances a living being" (Freud 5). Once a machine evolves a consciousness, emotions, and desires, it becomes unpredictable, ruthless, and by common lore, hostile towards humans. This links back to Loftis's critique of associating autism portrayals with criminal tendencies due to the combination of a genial brain and lack of conscience, morale, and emotion.

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12   I do not wish to make generalised statements about autists, however, restricted and repetitive behaviours are part of the diagnostic criteria in the ICD and DSM (see Chapter 6.1).

Of course, autists are not machines in the first place. However, the metaphor reinforces the idea that they are caught up in ever same routines to the point of obsession and that they have no concept of emotion or how to be human. As such, they are boring, predictable, and unable to return feelings.

The following aspects allude to the stereotype '*Robot*' in autism portrayals:

- **Routine and Order:** These characters have strict routines in their everyday lives, to the point where they become compulsive. Consequently, surprise or change may cause emotional distress. Routines may include food, clothes, reciting facts, or daily schedules.
- **Devoid of emotions**: To others, these characters appear to lack emotions, especially 'deep' ones. Social interactions seem rehearsed, attributing to the impression that emotions do not come naturally to these characters.
- **Communication barrier**: Misunderstandings frequently arise because characters have difficulties expressing their thoughts and emotions, thus failing to communicate successfully with others.
- **Mind-blind:** Although this idea remains contested, some novels explicitly allude to it. Here, characters are portrayed as being incapable of attributing desires, needs, and wishes to others, thus making them appear rather egocentric.

v.   *Portraying Autists as Aliens*

This trope is settled somewhere between a metaphor and a joke. Being alien attests to several things simultaneously; being different, not being human, being an imposter pretending to be human, being unable to ever grasp fully what it means to be human, etc. It also implies that autistic individuals are of a non-human origin but have an obligation to fit in, since they are 'living amongst us'. Obviously, this stereotype is not referring to Martians but to somebody who appears to be fully human but communicates differently and thus gives the impression of being 'not hu-

man' but in a human body. However, "(current) portrayals of aliens may show more about who we, the humans, are than they do about our extragalactic contraries" (Hacking, "Humans, Aliens & Autism" p. 45). Consequently, the idea of autistic individuals as aliens implies the incompatibility with any notions (stereotypes) a person might have concerning *humans*. Yet it does not, for we cannot fathom anything outside the concepts we are familiar with. It is a stereotype that was created by the scientific discourse on autism and intertwined with the metaphorical notion of autistic individuals as aliens that are unable to 'read' human beings, to understand their desires, beliefs, or emotions, which emerged in the media (see Chapter 5.4). The idea is used in fictional and non-fictional contexts, and across different autism communities (cf. *An Anthropologist on Mars* by Oliver Sacks, *Through the Eyes of Aliens* by Jasmine Lee O'Neill, *Women from Another Planet?* by Jean Kearns Miller, *Of Mice and Aliens* by Kathy Hoopmann). Although controversially discussed, some autists picked up the metaphor to describe their struggles. Activist Jim Sinclair once stated:

> Each of us [autistic people] who does learn to talk to you, each of us who manages to function at all in your society, each of us who manages to reach out and make a connection with you, is operating in alien territory, making contact with alien beings. We spend our entire lives doing this. And then you tell us that we can't relate. (qtd. in Hacking, "Humans, Aliens & Autism" 50–51)

Since the alien metaphor is often used in a joking way, it is more of a trope than a stereotype. Nevertheless, it carries with it the idea that autists are not fully human, which could trigger a series of negative stereotypes. Therefore, I will not define any criteria but will mention instances where it is alluded to.