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## Tracking the great detective: an exploration of the possibility and value of contemporary Sherlock Holmes narratives

Jacob Jedidiah Horn  
*University of Iowa*

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TRACKING THE GREAT DETECTIVE:  
AN EXPLORATION OF THE POSSIBILITY AND VALUE OF  
CONTEMPORARY SHERLOCK HOLMES NARRATIVES

by

Jacob Jedidiah Horn

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the Doctor of  
Philosophy degree in English  
in the Graduate College of  
The University of Iowa

May 2014

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Corey Creekmur

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Graduate College  
The University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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PH.D. THESIS

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This is to certify that the Ph.D. thesis of

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has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English at the May 2014 graduation.

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To Elise, who patiently listened as I rambled about Holmes and genre literature.

Behold the fruit of pensive nights and laborious days.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, “His Last Bow”

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First I must thank Professor Priya Kumar, without whose encouragement for my writing on Sherlock Holmes this dissertation would be much different. I did not begin graduate school with a plan to write on Conan Doyle's detective, but it is now hard for me to imagine a better topic.

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## **ABSTRACT**

Created at the end of the nineteenth century, Sherlock Holmes has remained a regular feature of popular culture for now more than a century. However, versions of the detective that have appeared in recent years are strikingly different from the character created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, while some characteristics remain similar. This dissertation examines the persistence of Holmes as a function of copyright management that matched shifting literary expectations, following this with an exploration of three categories of discourse in which contemporary Holmes texts participate: feminism, postcolonialism, and neurodiversity. It first locates Holmes's difference from prior detectives in his humanist characteristics and then demonstrates that a restrictive character management strategy shared by Conan Doyle and his sons, the subsequent rights-holders, constructed a base version of the character. When the copyright passed out of their hands, the new owners' more permissive attitudes toward using Holmes matched popular interest in deconstructing characters and ideas, allowing for a variety of new approaches to the detective. The second half of the dissertation explores some of these new approaches, beginning with critiques of Holmes's masculinist, misogynist science that are exposed and repaired through new texts. Following that, a pair of postcolonial texts demonstrates contrasting styles of handling the detective's imperial associations, and a final discussion of Holmes as a neurologically different individual brings him to both neurodiversity and disability studies. Authors' deployment of the detective can contain complex narratives, and while these texts are fascinating the dissertation will conclude with a note of concern regarding their continuing popularity.



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## INTRODUCTION

“What do you know about Sherlock Holmes?” I posed this question to a Taiwanese student of mine and was surprised at her sheepish reply that she did not know what I was talking about. Intrigued, I mimed holding a pipe and outlined the shape of a deerstalker cap on my head, at which her eyes widened and she smiled, relieved to recognize the reference: “Oh, he’s the detective!” She quickly established that he solved mysteries, that he had a partner, and that he was pretty old (though whether she meant physical age or age of creation was unclear). However, she could neither name a single Holmes story nor recall a specific text—in any medium—from which her information came. Our inquiry stalled, lacking a specific point of reference, and we were forced to assume that she had learned about him in piecemeal from texts that referred to him or his most iconic characteristics. Changing tack, I asked her what kind of person she thought Holmes was, and she grew uncertain again. “A good guy?” she hazarded, “Someone who solves mysteries?” After a little thought she finally asked “He is kind of mean sometimes?” I assured her that she was right on all counts, including the apparent conflict between being “mean” and “a good guy,” and though we moved to other topics the exchange continues to fascinate me. Our discussion occurred during my preliminary research for this project and reinforced my interest in the persistence of the great detective; my student, despite her unfamiliarity with any specific material, knew enough about Holmes to have not only a sense of his basic characteristics but also some confusion about the essence of the character. Holmes exists for her tenuously, but he exists and carries meaning.

The demonstrable, incredible persistence of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's creation drives the central inquiry of this project, which offers better understanding of the great detective's cultural resilience—both in terms of how it has occurred and what can be learned from it. I may have revealed my biases here at this early moment by describing Holmes's resilience as “cultural,” and indeed much of what motivates this study comes from a cultural studies approach to popular fiction. There is a tendency to ascribe a barometric value to widely consumed or regularly produced literature, especially as genres and styles perceptibly shift in popularity, and I have sought to keep this in mind in my investigation of the detective's history alongside texts featuring him. As I hope will become clear, much of Holmes's unique opportunity for longevity depends upon the shifting conditions of his ownership and the interaction between these changes and the wider literary trends in the twentieth century. There are now so many texts featuring the detective that he now more closely resembles a genre than a character; this situation has led to a productive if somewhat inconsistent form of stability. Holmes is partly so fascinating because a definitive version of him may never have existed, and that lack of definition—occurring within the seemingly well-defined space of the “Holmes ratiocinative detective story”—has allowed for incredibly inventive and useful parodies, pastiches, and appropriations in recent years.

Before diving toward the pile of contemporary texts that exemplify this, recognition that Conan Doyle did not build the detective whole in one fell swoop and instead created his character piecemeal through the stories effectively situates the mutating character within a framework of original instability. When comparing versions of Holmes in the first text, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), and its sequel, *The Sign of Four*

(1890), we can make out a clear distinction between the science-minded experimenter and the aesthetic, manic depressive drug addict. Holmes's well-known drug addiction to the "seven-per-cent. solution" of cocaine (*New Annotated Novels* 212), and his alternating moods, from being "bright, eager, and in excellent spirits" to "fits of the blackest depression" (237) are significant departures from the cold clinician of the first text. Despite this substantial expansion, the collection of characteristics settles in the short stories, and few critical additions occur in later Conan Doyle texts. The detective's mannerisms became not only characteristics but near-universal signifiers for the detective himself, almost completely overshadowing other, smaller changes made by Conan Doyle in later texts (such as Holmes's greater interest in spirituality and broader existentialist concerns<sup>1</sup>).

Throughout the canonical texts (the fifty-six short stories and four novels written by Conan Doyle), Holmes is best understood not as a drawing that grows gradually more well-defined with each text but rather as an ever expanding constellation of data—some of which comes from sources other than his creator. As my student demonstrated, the pipe and cap are fundamental signifiers for the character, alongside the solution of mysteries and seemingly impossible ratiocinative observations. The canonical texts never mention this deerstalker cap, which originally appeared in illustration (by Sidney Paget) before becoming part of the "standard" outfit in films and television. Along similar lines, Holmes's identifying phrase, "Elementary, my dear Watson," has little to do with Conan Doyle, having never been uttered in his texts. Its provenance begins with a stage play by William Hooker Gillette, in which it appears as "Oh, this is elementary, my dear fellow";

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<sup>1</sup> The Holmes of "The Cardboard Box" (1892) worries that all his work will end in misery, and in "The Adventure of the Retired Colourman" (1926) he bemoans the futility of human life and effort.

it was later modified to “Elementary, my dear Watson” for films (Bryan). Few readers are familiar enough with the minutiae of Holmes trivia to know that the canonical detective never says his most famous line, and fewer still would consider the deerstalker an external element, but almost any reader—when confronted with either signifier—would immediately think of Holmes, mysteries, and detection. The creation of Sherlock Holmes surely rests with Conan Doyle, but it is important to see that the accretion of specific characteristics and associated accoutrement around the character occurs not solely within the canon but also through adaptation and pastiche. These items now signify the character so strongly that they serve as shorthand for not only the detective but also a style of detection, and their origin outside of the canon—at least in part—indicates the value of adaptation and pastiche to cultural awareness of the character. Holmes exists as a combination of all his appearances, and his appearances have been quite numerous.

Given the breadth of choice of text for Holmes scholars, selecting useful material to explore can be difficult. Numerous books focus solely on providing an accurate bibliography of Holmes pastiches and adaptations,<sup>2</sup> and in May of 2012 Guinness World Records awarded the character the slightly over-determined “most portrayed literary human character in film and television” (“Sherlock Holmes Awarded Title”).<sup>3</sup> In the build-up to the release of Guy Ritchie’s film *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), CNN ran an article on their website recognizing the ubiquity of the detective, in which Jo Piazza suggests that “Holmes as a character is flexible enough that he can be dropped into any sort of

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<sup>2</sup> See for example Ronald Burt De Waal’s 1974 (revised in 1988) *The World Bibliography of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson* or his later addition *The Universal Sherlock Holmes* from 1994, in addition to Chris Redmond’s more narrative *Sherlock Holmes Handbook* updated in 2012.

<sup>3</sup> The circumlocution surrounding the award is amusing, particularly the subcategorization “human,” but it remains necessary because the most portrayed literary figure of any kind is Stoker’s Dracula, who surpasses Holmes by eighteen appearances (two hundred seventy-two versus two hundred fifty-four); the second-most portrayed “literary human” is Shakespeare’s Hamlet (“Sherlock Holmes Awarded Title”).

plot” (Piazza), a claim that, despite being somewhat hyperbolic, is not too far from the truth. In a fascinating essay on the utility of Holmes for understanding the Victorian mind, Christopher Clausen asserts the consequences of this flexibility and ubiquity: “few characters in all of literature are as widely known as Sherlock Holmes” (Clausen 66). The detective has plainly suffered little decline in popularity since his original publication—a situation he shares with a few literary creations from the late Victorian period (such as *Dracula*), but one that remains elusive for the vast majority of fictional characters. Other, similar detectives such as Dupin and Poirot have their devotees, but none would suggest that they have been as significant a part of twentieth century culture. And as Holmes inspires more adaptations and pastiches, greater liberties are taken with the character.

A contentious example of this is Guy Ritchie’s aforementioned *Sherlock Holmes*, which remains fitfully faithful to the canon while generously expanding on some of the detective’s lesser-known characteristics. New elements, including a steampunk-inspired atmosphere and a shift in tenor from contemplation toward action, accent material carried over from the originals; Holmes displays all of his traditional skills, including surprisingly insightful deductive skill, clever disguise and eccentric experimentation, all of which is placed alongside anachronistic Taser-like devices and bare-knuckle boxing. Though criticized in some quarters for being far too focused on action and adventure (Peter Rainer of the *Christian Science Monitor* describes this version of Holmes as “a kind of kung fu Ratso Rizzo”), there are details upon which Ritchie can fall back to support his depiction of Holmes, not least of which is the reference to “baritsu,” an English adaptation of Japanese martial arts, which Holmes describes as useful in his

defeat of Moriarty at Reichenbach.<sup>4</sup> This detail, though certainly canonical, does not truly prove his critics wrong, but it does provide room for seeing Ritchie's interpretation as having basis in the "facts" of Holmes's life and skills; it is a movie "inspired by the facts" of a fictional world. As a sourced change away from more traditional presentations of Holmes, the dismay it caused some of the Holmes faithful is baffling only insofar as we believe all "traditional" pastiche exclusively apes the canon. Interestingly, despite the absence of other signifying material, including the "Elementary" line and the use of the deerstalker hat, the character remains recognizable in Ritchie's film.

Other recent Holmes pastiches have pleased canonically sensitive readers more, as reviews of Anthony Horowitz' novel *The House of Silk* (2011) exhibit. Ostensibly an unpublished story of Holmes's most harrowing encounter, the novel brings the basics of Holmes to bear quite effectively and fulfills a great many of the expectations of a Holmes novel without breaking from the Conan Doyle model. A brief list of these include: narration provided by Dr. Watson; a complicated mystery involving a set of other, smaller mysteries; the appearance (and limited utility) of Mycroft; numerous clever deductions; and a pre-Reichenbach cameo by Professor Moriarty, among many other components. In a discussion of the novel and the broader Holmes legacy, D. J. Taylor observes that the book contains nearly every possible Holmes association, betraying "a suspicion that unless every single element of the Holmes legend can be brought to the feast, the story is bound to fall flat" (Taylor). Though it would be strange to see all of these together in the same Conan Doyle story, the element that fully locates *The House of Silk* outside the canon is the nature of the villainy under investigation: the sexual abuse of

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly, Conan Doyle misspelled the name of the martial art, and it originally appeared as "bartitsu" when taught in England by Edward William Barton-Wright, according to Emelyne Godfrey in "Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of Baritsu" (2009).



children. Such a topic would have been taboo for Conan Doyle, though it provides a sufficiently evil set of antagonists for twenty-first century readers while simultaneously supplying a reason for its absence from the canon. Dr. Watson, in his introduction to the story (itself a nod to *A Study in Scarlet*), describes the reason for their absence in terms of their being “too monstrous, too shocking to appear in print” (Horowitz 5). Unlike Ritchie’s film, Horowitz’ novel replicates the canon more completely, earning high marks from many other reviewers for its fidelity.<sup>5</sup>

This commitment to effective mimicry of Conan Doyle’s version of the detective does not exclude a change in the tone of the narratives, and even this very careful pastiche makes some relatively fundamental changes. Conflicting with Christopher Clausen’s observation that most canonical Holmes stories do not focus on the causes of social problems (Clausen 113), Horowitz presses a consciousness of social issues onto Holmes through the death of one of his street urchin assistants, the Baker Street Irregulars. Though they appear regularly in Conan Doyle’s originals, the nature of their existence as essentially beggar children whose labor is exploited by Holmes (admittedly with relative generosity given his rates of payment) is laid bare by the narrative. He tells Watson that “he might never call upon the services of the Baker Street Irregulars again” (Horowitz 292) and, in retribution for the House of Silk’s predation on children broadly and his irregulars particularly, burns its headquarters down. Though these actions do not improve the condition of the irregulars or otherwise work to prevent future systemic child abuse, the novel does place Holmes in conversation with the social conditions of the children that he had previously taken for granted. Even as contemporary pastiches of

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<sup>5</sup> *The Guardian* notes that “all of the elements are there... This is a no-shit Sherlock” (Sansom), while *The Washington Post* enthuses over the book’s “mimicking of the style and tone of Arthur Conan Doyle,” calling it “one of the best Sherlockian pieces of our time” (Dirda).

Holmes may appear quite traditional they bring interesting changes to the character and explore Conan Doyle's invention from new directions.

These two texts illustrate a clear tension faced by producers and readers of contemporary Holmes narratives, as all must add something new to avoid simply rewriting Conan Doyle's originals, but the scope of additions directly impacts their consumption and reception. This concern is helpfully addressed by theorists exploring the evolution of genre; as described by Steve Neale, genre is both static and dynamic: "Genres, then, are not systems: they are processes of systematisation...It is only as such that they can function to provide, simultaneously, both regulation and variety" (51). As Holmes-centered texts change, they must remain within an approachable framework and innovate at the same time—a difficult demand. Further, these variations are often read as reflections of the times in which they occur, and a cultural studies perspective offers the opportunity to read the shifts in a given genre through an historical lens. This perspective has directed my research toward investigations adaptations and pastiches that offer connections to wider cultural questions and concerns in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. However, the breadth of available texts for analysis is mind-bogglingly large, making any selection of a smaller subset of useful texts somewhat difficult.

Thankfully, three factors narrow this field. The first and perhaps most immediately accessible of these is the profusion of high-quality Holmes pastiches and adaptations produced in the last two decades. This period will contain all of the primary texts to be discussed in the later chapters of this project. The second concern comes from the field of literary theory and stems from the spreading impact of postmodernism,

specifically in its suspicion of master narratives and scientific paradigms. This postmodernist critique cannot help but have a significant impact on perhaps the most well-known empiricist in fiction, and the texts produced in the postmodern era and our current situation have been forced to grapple with this problem, doing so successfully in fascinating ways that unpack the variety of assumptions essential to Holmes. The postmodern shift reverberates throughout all of the major texts I will examine, creating a useful link across the chapters by exploring negotiations in the production of knowledge in a post-objectivity world. The third and final factor concerns the ownership and use of the copyright on Sherlock Holmes, the convoluted history of which deserves its own book. For this project, the shift in copyright owners from Conan Doyle to his son, and then his daughter, and finally to the current holders, the Conan Doyle estate, provides a fascinating example of how increasing permissiveness regarding the use of the character have led to parallel increases in the possibility for cultural commentary in the texts. Aside from providing a useful narrowing of the field of Holmes texts, these concerns also give structure to this project as a whole.

The conditions that have produced such interesting texts in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries are fascinating in themselves and provide an easy subject for the first two chapters, the first of which will examine both the historical situation of Holmes publication as a money-making enterprise and the importance of seeing stories featuring him in terms of his broader genre. Understanding first what the mystery genre is and does alongside what Holmes brings to it in his historical moment will pave the way for awareness of the (generally) careful management of the character. This vigilant deployment of the detective began his transition from a simple fictional creation to

something more substantial: a persistent, almost collaged character best understood through the lens of genre theory. Approaching Holmes as a genre requires a two-pronged approach: understanding how genres function generally and how those rules can apply to Holmes, and exploring the mystery genre more specifically alongside Holmes's fit with the particulars of that genre. Limited pastiche of Holmes and adaptation in various formats marked the middle of the twentieth century and did not allow for much growth or experimentation with the character, though his popularity remained relatively high; these years will not receive great focus, and instead the transition to the last quarter of the twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first will be more closely scrutinized. This project will look closely at the shift from faithful adaptation toward more ambitious pastiche, which accompanied both a change in ownership of the Holmes copyright as well as a change in the way genre has been approached due to structuralism and postmodernism.

Chapter two will provide a second base for the remaining chapters, relying on the fact that useful exploration of the Holmes figure could only occur in the 1970s after copyright owners were willing to allow a more playful kind of pastiche *and* cultural encouragement of deconstruction and criticism of prior narratives influenced authors working with Holmes. Stories featuring the detective written in the last quarter of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first are substantially different from stories found before this time, being more profoundly interested in the nature of the detective and how that nature can be used, expanded upon, and criticized in new ways. These are texts produced by self-aware creators who grew up with Holmes in one form or another; their knowledge of the detective and awareness of changes in the literary landscape generate

carefully reflexive revisions and pastiches. Of these new texts, the most interesting interrogate the detective's continued use as an uncritical producer of meaning and understanding in a world that questions such production, engaging with Holmes's role directly while never fully dismissing the detective's utility. However, they are potentially threatened by the shifting nature of legal ownership of characters in the twenty-first century, as the estate plans to move toward a more restrictive trademark system to retain income when the last of Conan Doyle's texts enter the public domain. This outcome is not guaranteed, and looking over the law and other cases will allow for a tentative projection into the future of Holmes as a continuing character.

Building upon these first two areas of inquiry, the final three chapters will analyze texts that adapt Holmes as described in chapter two, placing the detective into situations where his prior limitations are exposed while never dismissing his efforts entirely. The texts that I will discuss are aware of the difficulties facing easy ratiocination and belief in an accessible "truth" but do not scorn Holmes; all seek to find ways of positively engaging him in this new situation. It would be easy for postmodern pastiche to treat the great detective as an anachronism, a figure whose time has passed and should be relegated to historical study; avoiding this simple restructuring of the Holmes character suggests that something about the character remains useful and perhaps necessary despite shifts in the cultural dynamic. This willingness to find ways of retaining Holmes's value will remain an underlying theme as the chapters progress chronologically through three groupings.

Chapter three begins by recognizing the dismissive and sometimes misogynistic attitudes demonstrated by Holmes in the canonical tales, establishing that the original

version of the character was not particularly interested in the contributions of women. A number of scholars have recognized this feature and explored it, and the gaps in Holmes's awareness of women's lives gesture toward cracks in his empiricist rationality. That very philosophy—central to early scientific studies and an appearance of scientific reason—links the detective to narratives of scientific authority and masculinist biases in the field, and this chapter will explore those links to assert the detective's vulnerability to feminist critiques of science and science theory. Referring largely to the work of Helen Longino, I will assert that belief in scientific realism, which values truth significantly less than utility, provides a functional criticism of and correction to Holmes's myopia. Echoing this in fiction, Laurie King's *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* offers a new character to challenge the detective in Mary Russell, whose talents force Holmes to consider the value of alternative perspectives that might offer better descriptive power. This feminist criticism does not undo science or Holmes, and instead offers a corrective—philosophical and practical—that enhances the capacities of science and thus also detection.

Chapter four approaches Conan Doyle's detective from a different direction, exploring the character's role as an agent of the British Empire. Numerous critics have demonstrated that although Holmes is largely bound to England generally and London in particular, his cases regularly confront the impact of colonialism on the metropole; Sherlock Holmes acts to clean up the messes that imperial ambition and excursions send back to the home country throughout the canon. This, on top of his role as a scientific thinker and civilizing force, ties him to the imperial project, with a variety of interesting postcolonial reactions occurring in response. Reacting directly against the detective as an imperial agent is Partha Basu, and his novel *The Curious Case of 221B: The Secret*

*Notebooks of John H. Watson, MD* (2009) offers revised versions of numerous canonical tales, clarifying Holmes's inability to truly understand what he claimed to resolve. Basu's inversion of the dominant/subordinate relationship between Holmes and Watson and his revelation that the detective's prowess was greatly overstated exemplifies a kind of postcolonial "writing back." Of more interest is Jamyang Norbu's *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* (1999), which relies upon Holmes's nationalist character to support a claim for Tibetan independence, all while distancing the detective from colonialist rhetoric by critiquing Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) in a clearer postcolonial revision. Norbu deploys Holmes to generate popular support of a historically fraught position, and in so doing finds value in a character that might be assumed to have no use for postcolonial writers and readers.

The fifth and final chapter shifts to a relatively new area of study: neurodiversity and disability studies. Exploring the BBC's television series *Sherlock* (2010) and its depiction of Holmes as a high-functioning sociopath, this chapter will look at the show's concerns regarding the roles that different kinds of minds within our contemporary culture might have. The show's decision to put mental difference front and center—not only with Holmes but with many characters in the series—places sociopathy into conversation with disability. Approaching the series using disability studies theory, primarily from Lennard Davis and David Mitchell, offers the opportunity to compare the trajectory of the series' first episode with traditional, problematic disability stories. The show manages to avoid some but not all of these tropes, suggesting that in giving the detective disabilities, Holmes stories can partially challenge conventions and expectations. Alongside *Sherlock*, Holmes functions as a kind of key to understanding

autism in Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (2003). In its representation of life on the autism spectrum, Haddon's novel relies upon canonical Holmes not only for its title but also for its protagonist's self-description; in using familiarity with Holmes to offer readers a path toward understanding autism, *The Curious Incident* continues the detective's association with mental difference. That pathway, in part due to the ease with which it can be followed, suggests a completeness of understanding that belies the complexity of the spectrum. In the end, Haddon's book illustrates certain limitations of Holmes as an explanatory figure, and it is this question and concern with which we will conclude.

Persistence rests at the heart of this project, primarily persistence of narrative, and if boiled down to a single inquiry this project attempts to answer "What does it matter that Sherlock Holmes is still popular?" Any such summary question oversimplifies its subject, and the work of this project will show that exploration will reveal the depths of this question in a productive manner. I hope that my efforts to expand upon and answer this question are useful for both better understanding of fictional persistence broadly and a greater appreciation of Sherlock Holmes. This project's exploration of genre studies will provide options for future work on similar characters, and its awareness of the conditions of production and distribution demonstrates the continued importance of external, non-literary forces for cultural studies of literature. Popularity cannot be taken to mean everything, but nor should it be ignored entirely; the unique information it provides offers useful and fascinating insight, assuming, of course, that we are able to fit the clues it provides into a productive narrative.



## CHAPTER I

### THE ADVENTURE OF CREATION AND CONSOLIDATION

In 1912, critic Arthur Guiterman published a short, humorous poem about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's creation, Sherlock Holmes, in the *London Opinion*. The poem lampoons some of the sillier moments in the Holmes canon while using a few revealing lines to indicate the debt the character owes prior texts:

Sherlock your sleuthhound with motives ulterior  
Sneers at Poe's 'Dupin' as 'very inferior!'  
Labels Gaboriau's clever 'Lecoq', indeed,  
Merely 'a bungler', a creature to mock indeed!  
This, when your plots and your methods in story owe  
More than a trifle to Poe and Gaboriau,  
Sets all the Muses of Helicon sorrowing.  
Borrow, Sir Knight, but be decent in borrowing! (González-Moreno 65)

The poem caught the attention of Conan Doyle, who found it amusing enough to respond in a later issue of the magazine with a short poetic rejoinder of his own, in which he replied

As the creator I've praised to satiety  
Poe's Monsieur Dupin, his skill and variety,  
And have admitted that in my detective work  
I owe to my model a deal of selective work.  
But is it not on the verge of inanity  
To put down to me my creation's crude vanity?  
He, the created, would scoff and would sneer,  
Where I, the creator, would bow and revere. (González-Moreno 65)

Here Conan Doyle recognizes the debt he owed prior authors and “would bow [to] and revere” them, clearly aware of how much his work depended upon theirs. Sherlock Holmes was still, even almost twenty years after his creation, a relative newcomer to his genre and the popular imagination, if already one of the most popular characters in

popular fiction. The conversation between Guiterman and Conan Doyle reveals a cultural awareness of the detective genre in which Holmes's creator participated but did not invent. Conan Doyle's detective fit into the literature of the late Victorian era as an interesting take on an extant form, and stories featuring Holmes did not wholly alter the basics of the genre that inspired his creation, despite the detective's lasting impact.

Fast-forwarding almost a century later, Sherlock Holmes now appears at the center of an incredible panoply of texts, from straight-forward adventures that retain the Victorian setting and culture (Horowitz's *House of Silk*, 2012), to animated television shows that place him in the future (*Sherlock Holmes in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Century*, 1999-2001), and even to a series of novels that bring the character's skills and techniques into the wild west (*Holmes on the Range*, 2006 to present). In a 2006 article titled "The Eternal Detective: The Undying Appeal of Sherlock Holmes," the author of the Western Holmes series, Steve Hockensmith, wrote that "Holmes isn't just the most popular character ever to emerge from the mystery genre: He *is* a genre—virtually an industry—unto himself" (27). From owing "more than a trifle" to his predecessors to perhaps being a genre "unto himself," Holmes has come a long way in strikingly untroubled form. His persistence is surprising if not entirely unique,<sup>1</sup> given the speed with which texts lose their relevance and the conspicuous variety of new material constantly distributed for popular consumption. Even more extraordinary, Holmes's recent appearances are not simply rehashed and repackaged adaptations of canonical stories produced by Conan Doyle, though writers do still craft such texts today. Instead, many authors since the 1970s have been constructing plots for the great detective that place him in dialogue with serious cultural concerns and significant contemporary problems; as later chapters will show,

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<sup>1</sup> Several other Victorian figures have remained quite robust, including Tarzan and Dracula.

these issues sometimes explore relatively traditional twentieth century concerns, such as feminism, but also connect the detective to concerns less immediately associated with Holmes, including nationalism and neurotypicality.

These critically engaged texts bring the detective genre represented by Holmes into conversation with issues entirely unknown or irrelevant to the canonical character, and in so doing they rely upon an established, widely known identity for Conan Doyle's detective and a sense of the genre within which he operated. Such awareness is difficult to discuss, as it does not refer to any one specific text and exists instead as a composite of multiple texts from various media. It is "real" only as a set of signifiers that authors can tap into. Writers draw on details from the canon that they find particularly useful for their narratives and rely on readers to remember and actively engage with their knowledge of this idealized Holmes narrative. This "ideal Holmes" creates a space in which fictions that feature the character but do not necessarily follow the Conan Doyle approach to the genre can be written; it is what Hockensmith describes as a "genre" of Holmes. It is also a relatively unique occurrence in literary history. Perhaps only Bram Stoker's character Dracula has inspired similar fictional output, though the overlap between "vampire story" and Dracula is much greater than that of "detective story" and Holmes. This difference occurs due to the nature of the genre from which Holmes comes along with the great effort—and luck—of his creator and subsequent owners. Investigating the nature of these connections motivates this chapter, which begins an explanation of both the origin of this "ideal Holmes" and its necessity for later texts that rely on this "ideal" as a basis for their version of the character. While thousands of essays, books, and other academic work explicitly or implicitly acknowledge the great detective's importance, recognizing the

character as an icon of detective fiction and providing detailed explorations and analyses of his adventures, none provide sufficient explanation of the means through which the character has maintained such high levels of cultural awareness and relevance. This chapter will help to change that by positioning Holmes's trajectory as a continuing cultural phenomenon in terms of two central factors: the nature of the detective genre from which Holmes stems and the need for effective use of copyright by rights holders. Many other circumstances have led to Holmes's continued popularity, but continued exploration of Holmes's relationship to the detective genre and the power of the character's owners to determine his fate have the most consistent impact on the character.

In exploring the relationship of Holmes to genre, though this dissertation will demonstrate the truth of the character's status as a locus of text production similar to a genre, the project will also show that Holmes is *of* a genre. Recognizing this fact early is important, as doing so provides insight into the work of authors, critical of Holmes but also carefully deploying the detective, considered in later chapters, as all of their texts rely upon Holmes' origin in the ratiocinative detective subgenre of mystery narratives. The first section of this chapter will show that although Edgar Allen Poe invented this genre of storytelling with his C. Auguste Dupin, Conan Doyle refined Poe's creation by giving his characters a more human center—though this refinement did not dismiss the ratiocinative basis of the subgenre. Holmes works in a way quite similar to other ratiocinative characters, performing a version of scientific thinking by resolving a mystery with his near-superhuman deductive talents. In solving each narrative's puzzles using this standard system, Holmes participates in a genre that, according to structuralist critics such as Franco Moretti, generates a meaning and an interpretation *for* its audience.

Holmes and detectives like him build meaning and generate understanding, serving as cultural arbiters for truth (a dangerous position, according to Moretti). The character's meaning-generative powers remained even as he outgrew his genre of origin, making a full understanding of that genre's rules and differences from other material fundamental to interpreting the character's later use. And, as the later texts with which this project will engage participate in a complicated appreciation and critique of Holmes and his ratiocinative talents, a clear presentation of the genre's "rules" must occur before their various interventions can be fully understood.

Alongside this understanding, the early period of Sherlock Holmes's existence is marked by a series of clever and sometimes lucky decisions on the part of his copyright holders, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his two sons Denis and Adrian; their work and its results will appear in the second part of this chapter. While later rights holders would use the character in significantly different ways (a subjects for chapter two), Sir Arthur and his sons licensed the character in similar ways, resulting in the creation of the signifying network that has come to represent Sherlock Holmes. Based in large part on the canonical texts, the set of signifiers was threatened by the rise of non-text media portrayals of the character but eventually managed to use those media to both expand and reinforce the network. The creative work outside the canon began with the illustrations in *The Strand* provided by Sidney Paget and perhaps culminated with William Gillette's play *Sherlock Holmes* (1899); much supportive work occurred throughout this time, with a wide variety of licensed Holmes productions across a variety of media and the quashing of non-licensed material in cinema and elsewhere. In this way, the rights holders' ability to use the copyright upon Holmes to create a stable and lasting cultural figure argues for the

value of such protection, as without this safeguard the creation of a stable signifying network would have been greatly hindered. While perhaps not a direct critique of challenges to copyright protection, the case of Holmes's copyright use does demonstrate that copyright can assist the production of useful and interesting material, though its limits will be more fully discussed in the second chapter. For this chapter, establishing the creation of the signifying network, which will serve as the center of the Holmes "genre," is the primary goal.

These two sections will together ground Holmes's status as a figure within his genre and his evolution into a compilation of rules that current authors invoke in their texts. The character's genre origins, still a major part of Holmes after all this time, provide insight into the way the detective functions as a fictional participant in cultural conversations: he clarifies, simplifies, and provides answers to difficult problems. Concurrently, the expansion of the character outside of the canon, occurring largely through careful licensing of Holmes, provides an impressive narrative of a signifying network's creation. Once established, this network creates a literary space for further creations that can reference Holmes and rely on the breadth of prior stories to motivate reader interest and understanding. In this way, the development of the Holmes character through the use of copyright management builds the "genre" of Holmes. Thus the owners' copyright use and the character's ratiocinative origins are both essential aspects of Holmes's dual-natured relationship to genre, and are tied together thematically and chronologically.

### **Situating the Great Detective in Genre**

Of the two tasks set for this chapter, the first must be the exploration of Sherlock Holmes's genre of origin and its cultural value. Doing so fits chronologically, for it is difficult to discuss the character's copyright and later media appearances before understanding his creation, but it is also a significantly simpler discussion, if for no other reason than a number of scholars have already explored this material at length and the analysis here will rely heavily upon their work. This section will describe the mystery genre as a form distinct from (though related to) prior literature featuring mysteries, will situate Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's detective within this form as a unique creation that brought an element of humanity to the cold logic of the genre, and will provide a reading of the genre's value as a cultural tool for the production of knowledge and meaning. This last point builds upon the material in the previous two and is the most important factor for later analyses of Holmes texts; the ability of Conan Doyle's great detective to resolve mysteries brings with it a power that later authors will critique and rely upon, and it remains with the character no matter how he changes to fit new texts and alternate formats. The roots of Holmes, though perhaps distant, remain firmly planted in his genre origins and inform all current versions of the character, and so it is to these origins that the account turns.

It is axiomatic that the creation of Sherlock Holmes could not have occurred in a vacuum. Even before genre material prior to Holmes is consulted, numerous biographers and authors recognize the importance of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's instructor at the University of Edinburgh, Doctor Joseph Bell, as an inspiration for the character. They are not alone; Conan Doyle himself acknowledged the debt he owed Bell in an 1892 interview:

Sherlock Holmes is the literary embodiment, if I may so express it, of my memory of a professor of medicine at Edinburgh University, who would sit in the patients' waiting-room with a face like a Red Indian and diagnose the people as they came in, before they had even opened their mouths. (*Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters* 244)

It would be difficult to make the relationship between Bell and Holmes plainer, and the reverence with which Conan Doyle held Dr. Bell and his incredible deductive talents is quite plain. Bell's influence on Holmes' character and the implications of this link between fiction and science will reappear in the third chapter, in which Holmes' scientific associations will be under closer scrutiny. For the purposes of the current discussion, Bell's position as an inspiration for Holmes provides an opening into discussions of Conan Doyle's creation of Sherlock Holmes as a result of numerous factors coming together, most particularly his ability to dovetail his life experience (in the person of Bell) with his literary knowledge—particularly that of the mystery genre and Edgar Allen Poe's short stories. The author worked within this genre, acknowledging his predecessors and influences, and wrote not to upend the conventions of the mystery but to provide a new perspective from which to view them. Holmes's eventual movement beyond the genre is not entirely the work of his creator, and it is not something Conan Doyle accomplished intentionally.

In a 1907 account of books in his library and texts he read as a child, Conan Doyle described the influence an early encounter with Poe left upon him, writing that Poe was

the supreme original short story writer of all time...[creator of] nearly all our modern types of story...To him must be ascribed the monstrous progeny of writers on the detection of crime...Each may find some little development of his own, but his main art must trace back to those admirable stories of Monsieur Dupin. (*Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters* 94)



Conan Doyle's reverence for Poe's work is hard to overstate. When his literary efforts seemed doomed to rejection in the 1880s, just as he began work on *A Study in Scarlet*, Conan Doyle wrote that "Poe's masterful detective, M. Dupin, had from boyhood been one of my heroes. But could I bring an addition of my own?" (*Arthur Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters* 243). This anxiety regarding the possibility of useful contribution proved unfounded, but Conan Doyle clearly felt it at the time. He faced the difficult task of participating in a genre that already included a number of more or less definitive texts and characters, including Dupin and Émile Gaboriau's Monsieur Lecoq. His own experiences with Bell proved invaluable in separating Holmes from prior detectives, though the nature of that separation is not always immediately apparent—as Guitermann's poem cleverly observes. When Holmes speaks against Dupin and Lecoq in *A Study in Scarlet* (*New Annotated Novels* 43), Conan Doyle's inclusion of these predecessors is a clever acknowledgement of prior successes, not true disparagement.

In what, then, was Conan Doyle participating? Understanding Holmes's place in the detective genre has been the work of a number of scholars, from early and now somewhat forgotten efforts such as Howard Haycraft's *Murder for Pleasure* (1941) to later, more current explorations including John Cawelti's books on mystery and detective fiction, *Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* (1976) and *Mystery, Violence and Popular Culture* (2004). While this chapter has so far primarily referred to the genre from which Holmes comes as the "detective genre," many critics locate Conan Doyle's creation within a particular set of nested genres and subgenres, often starting with crime and then mystery, eventually working down toward detective and finally Poe's ratiocinative detective. In this series of contained subgenres the exact position of Holmes is fluid;

some critics read him in terms of crime fiction more broadly (Franco Moretti's "Clues" [1983] discussed below, is a good example of this) while others place him more specifically within Poe's sub-sub-genre of ratiocinative detective (historical work like Cawelti's *Adventure, Mystery, Romance* and Jerome Delamater and Ruth Prigozy's *Theory and Practice of Classic Detective Fiction* [1997] often situate him in this way). Yet others treat Holmes as a more representative figure of the detective genre more generally (see Jon Thompson's *Fiction, Crime, and Empire* [1993], discussed directly in chapter four), and some try to find a different way to categorize the detective entirely (as Tzvetan Todorov does in "The Typology of Detective Fiction" [1977], also discussed below). For this chapter and project, Holmes will appear in the middle ground of the detective genre, which will allow for the inclusion of relevant theoretical discussions from either more specific ratiocinative explorations or broader discussions of mystery as needed. This breadth will help determine the nature of Sherlock Holmes's uniqueness within these genres. The character's popularity, which seems quite out of proportion to his position as a figure from a highly specific subgenre of literature, only appears with careful attention to that which is new in his character with respect to these nested genres. To reach those concerns, the first point of discussion must be the broadest category: mystery itself.

David Grossvogel, in his *Mystery and Its Fictions: From Oedipus to Agatha Christie* (1979), claims that the concept of "mystery" in the popular stories of writers in the genre is a degradation of a significantly larger question of human engagement with the unknown. Though his eventual positioning of Christie in an inferior position to authors like Sophocles and Kafka is somewhat unnecessary and not valuable for this

project (having been performed largely in the service of a privileged status for mysteries that reveal something important about human existence) the concept of investigation and uncovering as a fundamental aspect of much literature remains a useful yardstick with which to measure the mystery genre. Grossvogel asserts that the true value of literature is in its recognition of “man’s continued effort to overcome the threat and the temptation presented by the unknown even after the failure of divine mediation, when he realizes that he is irremediably confined to this side of mystery” (4). In this sense of “mystery,” a story such as that of Oedipus’ hidden lineage and his attempt to discover the truth about his parents bears some structural similarities to the kind of mystery that underpins the popular genre. Both Oedipus and the protagonist of most mystery narratives are faced with an unknown, and both work to understand and bring knowledge to themselves and the reader.

But as Grossvogel notes, *Oedipus Rex* is not *about* the answer to his question, while the detective genre is: “The detective story does not propose to be ‘real’: it proposes only, and as a game, that the mystery is located on *this side* of the unknown...it allows the reader to play at being god with no resonance” (40). The mystery genre revolves around the ludic discovery and construction of a solution to a resolvable problem. Oedipus’s journey is a “real” tragedy for Grossvogel largely because of the damning nature of the information that is found and the questions that it raises about our own desire to know; the question should perhaps have been left alone, but it must be investigated. For mysteries, particularly the locked-room variety that he discusses when he cites Christie, the point is not truly to question the search for knowledge and ask the reader to consider the potential pitfalls therein; it is to solve a puzzle, a game. Instead of

forcing readers to consider their own inability to find truth, the detective genre emphasizes this act of resolution and the discovery of a “meaning” even more completely.

The link between a text that relies upon a mystery to motivate the action of the characters, such as *Oedipus Rex*, and that which treats the mystery as a puzzle to be solved, such as the majority of the mystery genre and the entirety of the Holmes canon, constitutes only one part of the separation of detective fiction from the broader realm of literary fiction. The importance of crime and the detective figure in all its guises are separate variables of the genre, and when these are placed in combination with the different levels of a given mystery’s importance, a vast number of possible configurations quickly appear and threaten to overwhelm the investigation. To forestall this and to create a shortcut through which the project may move back to Conan Doyle and Holmes more quickly, an examination of the first detective in Holmes’ tradition, Poe’s C. Auguste Dupin, provides a specific configuration to investigate. However, before exploring the fascinating opportunities that Poe’s creation provided, one final note on Grossvogel’s position is warranted; in claiming a link between the concepts of mystery used by Christie and Sophocles (and many others besides), Grossvogel recognizes the importance of the unknown in literature broadly<sup>2</sup> while distinguishing texts based on the level at which the mystery operates. This can appear dismissive, and Grossvogel’s treatment of Christie and similar writers unfairly writes them off for being less concerned with the issues he believes are important. However, the distinction remains valid and productive, providing a starting point for genre definition capable of broad categorizations if not fine

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<sup>2</sup> See his introduction for a clear statement of this.

divisions, and opening space for a basic understanding of what Poe did differently with Dupin.

In Grossvogel's formulation, texts that focus on the solution of a mystery without paying due attention to the unknown or the impossibility of knowing are not literature in any serious sense. Poe's Dupin must surely be located in the camp of mystery untanglers if not necessarily outside serious literature, as the stories in which he features revolve almost entirely around a puzzle-box problem that he can solve in its entirety. Quoting Edward Davidson's perception of Poe's detective, "Dupin is the supreme artistic ego: everything external to himself can be made to fit the theoretical, the ideal logic" (*Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* 100-101). Unlike Grossvogel's heroes that grapple with the unknown, Dupin is a thinker confronted with a problem, and he solves it using the careful application of a specific style of reason—a strategy that Poe found fascinating and included in many of his other stories, such as "The Gold Bug," describing it as "ratiocination" (Silverman 229). Though it bears many similarities to scientific thinking, this style of reasoning is not completely synonymous with experimental, scientific analysis, bearing with it a detached, untested deductive strategy that William Stowe describes rather clearly in his article on various deductive strategies in detective fiction as more semiotic than scientific in nature. Stowe cleverly aligns this ratiocination with the process of interpretation, suggesting that is not truly scientific but bears some similarities to the scientific method in its application of a deductive process that produces hypotheses.

Poe's Dupin relies on certain logical assumptions and assertions, and though his methods seem scientific, they lack the rigor of repeatable results (and the regular

discovery of dead ends). Instead of relying upon the scientific method, Dupin performs an interpretation of the facts available to him and produces a solution, creating a narrative for the events. This construction of meaning out of the noise of data produced in a crime is, as Stowe rightly notes, a semiotic procedure; the detective's narrative is an interpretation of events that tells a meaningful story. Though semiotic, this narrative is testable, and at times the ratiocinative detective can make mistakes (though Dupin never does). The testability of the narrative suggests that this ratiocination depends upon a provable "real" and thus parallels the scientific approach toward an observable reality. By referencing an objective narrative that the text assumes must exist, the detective's work fits a model of hypothesis and testing that can seem scientific—it assumes a broadly empirical relationship between observation and reality. But the absence of repeatability and the genre's demand that the "true" narrative be discoverable using pure deduction mark the detective story as more "scientistic" than scientific; it seems science-like, but it is not truly science. That said, its association with the popularization of science-related thinking marks the genre as culturally important if not of particular value in Grossvogel's formulation of "true" literature.

Not interested in the deeper unknowns troubling past texts, Dupin exemplifies an expansion of attitudes toward mystery, a movement away from or perhaps indifferent to the limits of human knowledge and intellectual power; the stories in which he features force the unknown to submit to his abilities, and the puzzles he solves prove the mind's power to understand, not its limits. In this the detective genre is greatly indebted to Poe's creation; the power of the human mind to comprehend and understand is of paramount value, such that future characters (including Holmes) become avatars of humanity's

potential for understanding. Numerous authors have explored the importance of Poe's contribution as the founder of the detective story, and this project will not restate their arguments.<sup>3</sup> The value of Dupin for this study is as an originary figure who defines the basics of the ratiocinative detective genre, within and against which Conan Doyle's creation must be placed. Thus the ratiocinative detective genre as created by Poe rests primarily on the detective's ability to use deduction and near-encyclopedic knowledge to resolve a mystery, and it is the crime and its solution that is the primary focus of such texts. The identity of the detective and the social conditions of the crime are secondary to the narrative, and the resolution of the mystery is the primary (sometimes only) issue at stake; rarely if ever does this resolution imply anything other than the intelligence, awareness, and insight of the detective and thus humanity more broadly.

When placed alongside the originator, Holmes clearly shares much with Dupin, including a striking intellect, a fondness for resolving mysteries or puzzles through the use of similar deductive techniques, an amateur status, and a position as a social outsider—self-imposed in both circumstances. In these commonalities, Holmes is indebted to Dupin and Conan Doyle to Poe, such that the work of the ratiocinative detective and its attendant rules and consequences remain applicable to the canon of Sherlock Holmes. This is not to say that Conan Doyle's creation fails to bring new material to the genre, but instead to suggest that the additions accompanying Conan Doyle's creation do not elide the genre, but instead find places where expansion and addition can enhance it. Most immediately obvious is the addition of Dr. Watson, who, as

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<sup>3</sup> Among relatively recent texts, John Gruesser's "Poe's Progeny: Varieties of Detection in Key American Literary Texts, 1841-1861" from *Poe's Pervasive Influence* (2012), John Scaggs's *Crime Fiction* (2005) and Martin Priestman's *Crime Fiction: From Poe to the Present* (1998) offer useful overviews of Poe's position.

a reader surrogate, helps to characterize Holmes' observations and interpretations as not only outside the realm of the everyday (for the very normal Watson never reaches these conclusions on his own) while also providing a reason for Holmes to explain his reasoning. While Poe's Dupin also appears through the words of a narrator, Poe's unnamed, blank voice does little to bring life to the tales. The interaction between Holmes and Watson, on the other hand, allows the reader into the text more easily and humanizes the cold process of ratiocination.

Peter Conroy explores this perception of Watson usefully in "The Importance of Being Watson" (1978), implying in his title that this importance is, in fact, earnestness. He situates the good doctor as "the human dimension" of Holmes's stories, which he asserts is "perhaps the most important reason for the tremendous success of the Holmes adventures" (53). Watson's fallibility and constant surprise at Holmes's incredible feats position him as a reader surrogate who conditions the audience's response to the mystery (and its solution) while also providing a window through which appreciation can be modulated. The ultimate cause of this humanization of the detective lies with Conan Doyle's writing style, and Conroy gives him adequate credit:

Not only does he incarnate a very subtle handling of narrative point of view which permits the most effective recounting of his story, but he also impregnates these narrations with their warm human glow, with that overpowering sympathy which allows us to forgive Watson his dullness and Holmes his aloofness and polite disdain. (53)

Conroy's recognition of the skill with which Conan Doyle wrote his stories gives the author a great deal of credit—something writers of detective fiction are not often granted by readers. To briefly provide comparison with the original detective, while Poe does receive significant credit as a writer (far more than Conan Doyle in most circumstances)



and his detective also appeared through the screen of a narrator, the anonymity of that narrator serves to harden Dupin's affect. He has no name, no characteristics that mark him as anything other than a cipher with which to demonstrate Dupin's talents. For Holmes's narratives, the addition of Watson as a more fully drawn character and the way with which Conan Doyle presents both the assistant and the detective begins to push the canon beyond mere puzzle-solving.

Agreeing with Conroy's recognition of the humanity that infuses Conan Doyle's stories, Cawelti locates this change in Holmes himself. He writes that "Sherlock Holmes is the stereotype of the rational, scientific investigator, the supreme man of reason" (*Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* 11), tying him to the traditional cold detective exemplified by Dupin; however, Cawelti goes on to say that "at the same time, his character paradoxically incorporates basic qualities from a contrary stereotype, that of the dreamy romantic poet, for Holmes is also a man of intuition, a dreamer, and a drugtaker, who spends hours fiddling aimlessly on his violin" (11). Cawelti's recognition of these points is quite useful as it opens discussion of the fact that the character changed even in Conan Doyle's hands. Throughout all the stories Holmes is characterized as "the supreme man of reason," but the characteristics Cawelti notes as applying more to "the dreamy romantic poet" do not appear until the second text, *The Sign of Four* (1890). Conan Doyle's first attempt, the pure "man of reason," is not sufficiently different from other ratiocinative detectives, but the addition of Dr. Watson and both his narrative accessibility and clear shortcomings provided a clear path from which to further separate the central character from other genre characters. Thus the humanization of Holmes was

part of a process of differentiation, not part of a complete plan at the character's inception.

To be fair, the difference between Dupin and Holmes in terms of eccentricity is one more of degree than kind, as Cawelti also notes the oddly “demonic” qualities of Dupin (*Adventure, Mystery, and Romance* 101). Despite this similarity, Holmes is certainly more well-known for his vices and eccentricities than Poe's detective, who is known primarily for the cases he solved. Cawelti's articulation of Holmes's peculiarities separates the detectives, and the more complex Sherlock Holmes benefits by comparison. As a more well-rounded, human figure, Holmes refines Dupin, and, though borrowing significantly from Poe, Conan Doyle builds a character that does not completely break the previously established form. Cawelti and Conroy are quite convincing, and their recognition that the foibles of Conan Doyle's characters enrich the detective genre, making it more approachable and enjoyable, creates a useful distinction for Holmes as a participant within the ratiocinative detective genre. Again, though Holmes does provide a different direction for the protagonist of the ratiocinative detective genre, this alternate perspective is not a critique; Conan Doyle writes within the genre and not against it.

Realizing Conan Doyle's participatory drive should not undermine his additions, and his humanized detective can be read as an implicit critique of the ratiocinator as “cold” or “unfeeling”; the case supporting this is somewhat thin, given the continuation of the detective genre's primary structure. Particularly within the first sequence of stories before “dying” at Reichenbach, Holmes remained a popular character in a wider genre. The vast majority of his cases does not rely upon either Dr. Watson or Holmes to act outside of the bounds of the classic ratiocinative model—nowhere does the “humanity”

located by Conroy and Cawelti help them solve their cases. Therefore, the work Holmes does within his texts remains similar to that of prior detectives, and the theoretical explorations provided by prior theorists remain applicable. However, in examining the way that theorists have approached the detective genre from which Holmes comes, the true value of Conan Doyle's additions as a method of "improving" the genre become visible and the nature of detectives as creators of truth and knowledge appears.

Despite being dismissed by high-culture demagogues such as Grossvogel, the mystery genre has received significant critical attention, especially from structuralist theoreticians who have identified its fundamental characteristics and hypothesized possible cultural value for it. Of prior critical approaches to mystery fiction, Franco Moretti's essay "Clues" (1983) and Tzvetan Todorov's "The Typology of Detective Fiction" (1977) are the most influential explorations of the structure and effects of the genre. These two essays provide the backbone against which almost all other analyses of the genre apply, and their work frames the efforts of both Poe and Conan Doyle quite completely; in fact, though it is clear that much of what Conan Doyle does is quite different from Poe, the structuralist vision of the genre sees little difference between them in terms of their overall cultural value or impact. In the perspective of a Moretti or Todorov, Conan Doyle's additions represent only a minor difference in degree; as Cawelti notes in his analysis of Conan Doyle, "a successful formulaic [genre] work is unique when, in addition to the pleasure inherent in the conventional structure, it brings a new element into the formula" (*Adventure, Mystery, & Romance* 12). Holmes consists of a new approach, a fresh engagement, but the "conventional structure" remains in place.

Of the structural theorists, Todorov provides the most direct analysis of the genre in terms of basic form, and much of his theorization remains useful for this project. In particular, his recognition of a dual narrative structure within all detective and mystery texts clarifies the importance of Conan Doyle's humanization of the detective. Todorov states that

At the base of the whodunit we find a duality, and it is this duality which will guide our description. This novel contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. (Todorov 44)

As a structural concern, this central claim creates different subcategories of mystery based on level of attention to either story; in Todorov's system, those stories focused mostly on the crime become the "whodunit," those focused mostly on the investigation become "thrillers," and a balance between the two creates "suspense." Todorov's categorizations recognize in Conan Doyle's work a primary focus on the reconstruction of the crime, thus making it a "whodunit"; the person of the detective is relatively unimportant to the solution of a "whodunit," insofar as their limitations and concerns as embodied figures have little to no impact on the narrative. This compares nicely with a "thriller" detective story, in which the process of investigation is itself the focus and the detective's personal stake, interests, and imperfections form a significant portion of the text's interest (perhaps Hammett or Chandler would better qualify in this category). Though some quibbling over terms has occurred after his definitions, the divisions that Todorov establishes illuminate the value of Conan Doyle's addition.

In a situation where detectives can largely be swapped for one another (and it is easy to imagine Dupin, Poirot, or Lecoq solving any of Holmes's cases), the decision to make Holmes more interesting as a person and character is a paradoxical one, providing

some evidence for treating Conan Doyle's texts as more than simple additions to the genre. In examining what limits genre fiction, Todorov reasons that "detective fiction has its norms; to 'develop' them is also to disappoint them; to 'improve upon' detective fiction is to write 'literature'" (Todorov 43). As elaboration of Holmes's character is unnecessary for the style of detective fiction in which he appears, Conan Doyle's efforts partially lift his work out of the genre confines and gesture toward a more literary approach to the "whodunit." Conan Doyle's additions thus rebut Grossvogel in part, demonstrating a more fluid boundary between "literature" and genre fiction than the theorist perceived, though Grossvogel's assertion of detective fiction's emphasis upon the mystery is borne out in Todorov's formulation. The humanization of the detective figure elevates the form to a degree, but the genre remains consistent underneath; its "norms" are not violated by Conan Doyle's changes, and the role served by these texts remains consistent, unaltered.

Todorov's treatment of detective fiction provides a schema with which to organize texts within the genre, but he says little regarding the value of the genre as a cultural product. For that, Franco Moretti's "Clues" offers a highly considered interpretation in which "detective fiction, through the detective, celebrates the man who gives the world a meaning" (Moretti 155). This meaning-producing detective fits a world in which narratives are "still desired, but only if the text itself contains an explicit mechanism for the disambiguation of meaning" (149); for Moretti, the modern, scientific world values this simplification, and thus the detective serves as an avatar of determination within the culture. Holmes may be a humanized ratiocinator, but in Moretti's reading of the genre he serves primarily to clarify and reduce uncertainties—or

at least to provide an example of the process that can be emulated in other situations. Conan Doyle's detective participates in a culture-wide celebration of reason and rationality, one that suggests cleverness and intelligence can find hidden truths, no matter how carefully they are obscured. This reading of Sherlock Holmes remains a powerful component of his character—a central factor in the postmodern turn discussed below—and thus a fundamental part of the textual analyses of later chapters. Holmes's role as an evaluator, producer, and distributor of meaning and knowledge remains crucial to understanding his cultural value, making Moretti's reading of the genre extraordinarily valuable even almost thirty years after its original publication.

Holmes here becomes proof of the power of reason, but in his role as disambiguator he closes off certain realms of possibility and interpretation—an implicit concern in Stowe's reading of Dupin made explicit here. Moretti recognizes this disambiguation as an insidious aspect of the genre, one that “promulgates a culture that is already a closed and self-referential system...if you read a detective story, you read a detective story. It doesn't help you ‘in life’” (155). Though superficially gesturing back toward Grossvogel in its concern for the limitations of such a close focus on the mystery as puzzle, Moretti's worries regarding the genre's lack of utility rest more on its indication of proscriptive cultural tendencies and less on its limited cultural status. He argues that though the genre appears to participate in the creation of understanding, “it embodies the opposite principle, which is to unfold fully in mass culture: a process which institutes a meaning—a culture—that disregards the active and conscious consensus of its members” (155). In this formulation, when Holmes or any other detective resolves a mystery, the act of doing so moves the interpretive act out of the “active and conscious

consensus” of the culture; meaning is no longer generated by social forces and is instead outsourced to professionals—or at least highly skilled amateurs. Moretti presents his fears persuasively, and they cannot be discounted with ease. However, they must be historicized properly, and the locus of the concern rests within the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century (155).

Looking at this time period carefully, Christopher Clausen presents an interpretation of Holmes that offers an alternative to Moretti’s pessimistic reading of the detective’s role within the genre. Instead of reading Holmes as entirely complicit and in agreement with the system as a whole, he finds that “Holmes’s social philosophy...is that while the existing order of things may be unattractive in many ways, his duty and vocation is nevertheless to protect it” (Clausen 75). Moretti’s position, that Holmes as an agent of culture-wide ossification of meaning, is undermined by the implicit criticisms in Conan Doyle’s narratives. For Clausen, a

character like Sherlock Holmes could grow to full stature only in a time when crime could plausibly be seen as the greatest threat to order and its detection the greatest of services, when the police were widely believed to be ineffectual, when science was viewed by its enthusiasts as a new force crusading for progress against ignorance and unreason. (89)

Holmes here becomes something more than an agent of order and social justice, he points out the flaws in the system. In place of creating an official order that “disregards the active and conscious consensus of its members,” the detective—particularly as an amateur thinker—invites the reader to see that their own reasoning capabilities can be far superior to those of the established authorities. And though he supports the system in many ways, his work simultaneously demonstrates the flaws in that very system.

Clausen petitions his readers to consider the role of the detective as something other than just “an upholder of the social order,” asking them to consider “what kind of social order is presupposed by [the detective’s] very existence as a free-lance ‘highest court of appeal’” (75). The actions of detectives such as Holmes work to re-establish order that is lost through criminal activity, but those efforts exhibit the limited efficacy of the police or other institutional entities. The reader of such detection sees both the restoration of order and the problems that institutions and institutional thinking are incapable of resolving. Moretti’s claims remain valuable, especially as part of a larger sense that “scientific” thinking is a privileged standard against which other modes of knowledge production are found wanting, but his claim ignores the possibility of seeing critical work done by the detective. Clausen singles out Conan Doyle’s Holmes narratives as unique for their time, as other authors rarely took “crime, its social context, or its implications as seriously as Conan Doyle did in the stories that made Sherlock Holmes one of the most famous characters in the world’s literature” (Clausen 89). In exploring this possibility, Clausen recognizes an interest in people—both victims and criminals—throughout Conan Doyle’s texts that is absent from the more puzzle-focused narratives. Once again, the distinction between Conan Doyle’s Holmes stories and others within his genre is a touch of humanity, and that humanity gives the detective the beginnings of a critical perspective. For though Clausen recognizes the criticisms of social justice that a “free-lance...court of appeal” entails, Moretti’s claim that detective fiction as a genre somehow professionalizes the act of creating meaning remains useful. Holmes will retain that position throughout his serious appearances, even in situations where he relies on entirely untrue “facts” about our real world.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Most famously, the resolution of “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” relies upon Holmes’s



Awareness of Conan Doyle's interest in and inclusion of the human element recurs throughout critical attention to the Holmes stories, separating the Holmes canon from other texts within the same genre and pushing them—perhaps only slightly—toward “literature” and away from pure genre fiction. Though Conan Doyle began his creation of the Holmes canon with trepidation, the narratives he created stand apart from the other genre fiction being written at the time through their dedication to the importance of humanity despite the power of reason and rational, deductive thinking. Writing within the genre quite completely, the author's Sherlock Holmes participates in the ratiocinative tradition established by Poe without hesitation, and the narratives featuring Holmes do not criticize that genre, they extend and expand it. Holmes narratives remain part of Moretti's meaning-creating detective as much as he explores the options presented by participation. In sum, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's stories featuring Sherlock Holmes appear within a nest of paradoxes and contradictions: the material exposes one of the genre's lapses, but the genre is not criticized through this act; the detective participates in the outsourcing of meaning construction, but concurrently asks readers to recognize the limits of the social infrastructure; and the character of Holmes himself changes over the course of his own narratives. These three concerns will remain of crucial importance in the chapters to come, as the paradoxes surrounding the character's continued participation in the genre and the work of criticizing it will recur throughout the analyses of late-twentieth and early twenty-first century texts.

Of the third concern, in which Conan Doyle's creation of Holmes occurred over multiple texts, awareness of this fact neatly prompts a discussion of what other materials

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“knowledge” that a bell could call a snake and that snakes would sometimes drink milk; snakes in fact do not drink milk and are deaf, but the presentation of these data as fact by Holmes lends them an air of believability and “reality” that cannot be overlooked.

have gone into the creation of the character. Conan Doyle cannot be doubted as the originator of Holmes, but he is not the only contributor to the character, and contemporary audiences often associate Holmes with cues and signifiers not taken from the canon. The narrative of this journey requires its own careful elaboration, relying upon a careful examination of the way copyright has impacted the character's expansion, at the end of which Holmes will exist not only as a part of the ratiocinative detective genre but also as a genre in and of himself.

### **Copyright, New Media, and Holmes as Genre**

Though Hockensmith's claim that Holmes "*is* a genre—virtually an industry—unto himself" (27) may seem true in the twenty-first century, such a result was not an obvious outcome, based either on expectations of other characters in the detective genre or the nature of the genre and its narratives. Conan Doyle's humanization of the detective may have separated his work from other material in its genre, but this merely provided an opportunity for expansion; it did not guarantee such an immense effect. Holmes is not the only figure with significant longevity, and there is much to be learned from the unique path which Holmes has traveled that can extend our understanding of other creations' cultural durability. After his creation and as his popularity increased, a number of factors came together to ensure Holmes's continued presence in the popular imagination, from the treatment of the copyright on the character, expansion into media outside of the printed page, and finally the quality of the signification network that comes to represent him. No discussions of the interplay between these factors have been found, but their interconnectedness appears essential to the continued success of an artistic product in a

capitalist system. Though luck must always play a role in the application of copyright privileges, the Holmes rights holders made decisions that greatly increased the character's popularity, primarily based upon a relatively unified strategy of maintaining the character's particular image. However, that image came to exist largely through the variety of available non-text media and the addition of film and television in the twentieth century, all of which provided opportunities for expanding a character's visibility and were used efficiently by Holmes's owners. This in turn was possible largely due to the tight web of signifiers that have come to represent Holmes, allowing audiences to recognize the detective immediately and creators to reference him quickly.

Each of these factors interrelates with the others, such that the rights holders' use of copyright to license particular presentations of Holmes further enhanced the strength of the semiotic links created by previous versions, making the non-text narratives and depictions both easier to create and another mode through which the network of signifiers for Holmes grows more distinct, which circled back to make licensing decisions easier and so on. They link together in a web of feedback loops too complicated to map entirely, but the general overview presented here can provide a perspective with which to approach the character in terms of something larger than a simple character within a genre. Beginning just prior to Holmes's return in 1903, this section will explore Conan Doyle's use of his rights to Holmes, the transfer of the great detective from the page to the theater and then to screens big and small, all of which created a particular "image" of the detective that persisted throughout the copyright tenure of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and his sons Denis and Adrian. Their work established a baseline ideal for Holmes stories

that the number and variety of adaptations throughout the twentieth century relied upon—the virtual definition of a genre, the implications of which this section will discuss.

Before this section's major work can begin, the issue of defining popularity must be briefly acknowledged and set aside. The question of what makes one text widely read and another unknown relies upon too many factors to make for an easy answer, and attempting to do so would require a book of its own—perhaps several. Instead of determining exactly what spoke to audiences at the time, this project will take the initial popularity of the stories as a starting point and then examine the decisions and conditions that helped that popularity continue. The demand for Holmes stories is undeniable, and the increased publication rates of the magazines that included his stories impress, with *The Strand* magazine famously selling more than five hundred thousand copies per issue at the height of Holmes' fame. This demand annoyed Conan Doyle, galvanizing both his 1893 decision to kill off Holmes in "The Final Problem" and his capitulation in returning the character to life ten years later. With this initial popularity as a foundational given, the inquiry shifts away from the nature of the popularity to the decisions and situations affecting its continuance, a central question of this project. This does not imply that the nature of a character's popularity is impossible to determine or that such work is unnecessary or invaluable; it is instead another vital aspect of the cultural examinations of figures such as Holmes that must be put aside due to the focus of the work here.

Of the three factors affecting Holmes's durability under discussion here, perhaps the most influential and least discussed is copyright law, particularly Conan Doyle's decisions to use his rights to protect his character in print and to license a specific version of him rather liberally—if carefully—to other media. The impact of legal constraints

upon persisting characters cannot be overstated, if for no other reason than that the eventual entrance into the public domain completely changes the way a character can be used. More subtly and relevant during Conan Doyle's life, a rights holder's decisions to exercise control over their property's use and appearance provides opportunities to maintain the popularity, increase it, or in some cases reduce it. Determining which of these outcomes will result from any given choice is nearly as difficult as identifying popularity, and considering the impact of change in copyright laws across time and national boundaries multiplies the problems of this work—perhaps another dissertation as well. Thankfully, in looking back at the actions of Conan Doyle and his heirs it is possible to identify some of their particularly successful choices without requiring a great deal of knowledge of copyright differences. However, throughout this discussion an awareness of the luck involved with the success of each decision should be kept in mind.

As a discussion of copyright's capacity to provide Conan Doyle the chance to create a stable, repeatable version of his character, much of this section runs contrary to certain assumed threads of discussion regarding the impact of copyright upon creativity and other cultural productions. Briefly, this perspective asserts that copyright is a significant restriction that needs careful attention if not outright elimination. Some of the more extreme advocates believe that copyright is itself unnecessary, whether due to concern for markets (N. Stephan Kinsella's "Against Intellectual Property") or advancing technology (Jorge Cortell's "Free Culture for All"), or perhaps a broader sense of stifled cultural communication. Less radical positions recognize the utility of copyright, and one of the more prominent critics of the law, Lawrence Lessig, notes that he's "fundamentally in favor—pro copyright" (Lessig). Nearly in the same breath, Lessig suggests that "what

I'm in favor of is copyright that, like its history, changes." Lessig, along with copyright critics like Siva Vaidhyanathan, are more accurately described as copyright reformers, in distinction to abolishers like Cortell and Kinsella, and the history of Sherlock Holmes's relationship to copyright fits the reformist attitude far better. The ability of the Conan Doyle family to control their character's presentation in various media provided the opportunity to build a lasting character, proving the value of copyright. Lacking this protection would have likely resulted in the oversaturation of the Sherlock Holmes character with signification (discussed in full below) and thus the dissolution of the character into his genre.

Copyright was therefore a great boon to both the family and the character. The narrative of Holmes's transition to his own genre refuses a copyright abolition stance, as without the early protection offered by copyright the character of Holmes would not now be what it is. That said, once the character was sufficiently established, later authors were able to use him in interesting ways that critically explored his value and meaning because of relatively lenient application of copyright powers on the part of copyright holders other than Conan Doyle and his sons (discussed in chapter two). The law did not grant these authors the right to present criticisms of the character, and the good will of the rights holders represented the primary opportunity for texts like those in chapters three, four, and five to exist. Vaidhyanathan might see this as a fortuitous occurrence, seeing copyright law's current situation as so dire that

...the law has lost sight of its original charge: to encourage creativity, science, and democracy. Instead, the law now protects the producers and taxes consumers. It rewards works already created and limits works yet to be created. The law has lost its mission, and the American people have lost control of it. (4)

For Vaidhyanathan, the law's ability to protect the copyright owners—often multinational corporations—is so great that it discourages the creation of new texts. Perhaps Sherlock Holmes's situation is further unique in its ability to produce fascinating new narratives in the face of this legal situation. The following chapter will explore the ramifications of lenient use of copyright but will also return to Vaidhyanathan's and Lessig's concerns about intellectual property law by turning to the end of copyright and the rise of the trademark. However, for this chapter the focus remains on copyright's function as protector of Conan Doyle's ability to not only create but to refine and consolidate a specific vision for his creation.

As far as it has been possible to determine, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle himself never used his legal rights to the Sherlock Holmes character to prevent unauthorized uses of his creation. Significant piracy of his stories occurred in the United States and elsewhere, about which the author was regularly angered,<sup>5</sup> but no cases of copyright infringement pursued by Conan Doyle have been discovered. One of the only clear examples of Conan Doyle using his copyright comes from personal correspondence between Conan Doyle and a man named Arthur Whitaker.<sup>6</sup> Whitaker sent Conan Doyle a story using Holmes and Watson called "The Man Who Was Wanted," asking if Conan Doyle would be interested in collaboration. Conan Doyle responded thusly:

Dear Sir  
I read your story. It is not bad & I don't see why you should not change the names, and try to get it published yourself. Of course you could not use the names of my characters. (*Nova 57 Minor*)

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<sup>5</sup> See Donald Redmond's fascinating *Sherlock Holmes among the Pirates* (1990) for a discussion of this situation; in short, though Conan Doyle wished to combat this piracy, sufficient legal recourse did not exist and, by the time it was in place, the pirate publishers had produced themselves out of existence.

<sup>6</sup> There is some belief that Maurice LeBlanc changed the name of an antagonist facing his Arsene Lupin from Sherlock Holmes to Herlock Sholmes at the behest of Conan Doyle's literary agent, A. P. Watt, though no full documentation of this has been discovered.

In the end, Conan Doyle paid the man ten guineas for the story and filed it away. Though Conan Doyle was able to resolve this situation amicably, his decision to retain print control over Sherlock Holmes demonstrates the value he placed on managing his character's image and characterization carefully. In his dismissal of Whitaker, Conan Doyle notes that his characters belong to him and that "of course" Whitaker could not use them, highlighting the casual nature of the author's belief in his ownership. Additionally, the author places great weight upon the names of the characters and not the form of the narrative, implicitly acknowledging that the format is not his own, but the characters (and perhaps by implication the characterizations) are. These actions are not unusual for a rights holder, but they are important—especially given his willingness to license the character for other media rather liberally in other circumstances and the impact that media has had on his character.

That Conan Doyle never mentioned the kind of hat worn by Sherlock Holmes in his stories is now a well-known fact among Holmes scholars, along with a laundry list of other features commonly associated with the character that were not the creation of the canon's author. The short stories featuring Sherlock Holmes published in *The Strand*, beginning with "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891), were accompanied by illustrations produced by Sidney Paget, who drew the now famous deerstalker cap for his depiction of the character.<sup>7</sup> Paget's pictures provided a clear visual referent for the detective, and the artist remained consistent in his representations of Holmes, solidifying these details in the minds of his audience. Though often relatively minor decisions, such as the determination that Holmes's pipe would have a straight shank, the depictions helped to "lock" a specific

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<sup>7</sup> The Inverness cape is generally ascribed to Paget as well.



image of Holmes. The illustrations were so potent that Donald Redmond, in his note that the short stories republished in the United States did not have the Paget accompaniment, wonders

What if the ‘Adventures’ as published in American newspapers had had the Paget illustrations? Would the impact of William Gillette on the stage a decade later...have been as overwhelming? Would the American conception of Holmes today be closer to the high forehead, prominent nose and rather ascetic look of Paget’s Holmes? (18)

Redmond is forcing the narrative forward toward Gillette, who will receive fuller attention shortly. Here, however, Paget’s example demonstrates the immediate impact that depictions of the detective outside of the printed word can have. His contributions added to Holmes’s significant and lasting popularity, even as they are faced changes when the detective appeared in other media.

Conan Doyle’s association with Paget was quite productive, but the most essential of his early licensing agreements occurred with William Gillette, who produced a play featuring Holmes during the period of Holmes’ presumed death (1893-1903). Though other plays had been authorized before,<sup>8</sup> the one performed by Gillette was extraordinarily popular and helped to consolidate Holmes’s image and signifiers, reconfiguring material from the canon and prior visual representations into a new set of visible and audible referents. The path from the texts to the stage was not without its difficulties, and Conan Doyle originally wrote a five act play of his own devising that he had trouble convincing others to perform. A popular actor of the time, Beerbohm Tree, was offered the chance to stage the new play but demanded the right to perform both Holmes and Moriarty, wishing to play Holmes while wearing a beard to differentiate the

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<sup>8</sup> Including one by Charles Brookfield in 1893 and another by John Webb in 1894—both also notable for being written within the period when Holmes was “dead.”

character; “Conan Doyle was not enthused” (*Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters* 395). Conan Doyle’s worry over maintaining his creation’s particular image sparks immediate interest—no beard would be found on his Holmes, except perhaps as part of a disguise—and highlights the importance the author placed on a particular vision for his creation. Tree’s trepidation with accepting the role as written is striking as well, and though no explanation of his reasons has been discovered, it seems likely that the prominence of the detective and his well-known appearance played a part in the decision to put his own stamp on the character.

Conan Doyle eventually met with theatrical producer Charles Frohman, who suggested William Gillette for the part and recommended that the material be revised somewhat at Gillette’s hands; Conan Doyle agreed and gave the staging copyright to Frohman, who passed Conan Doyle’s draft to Gillette for revision. The only stipulation placed upon the alterations was that Holmes was not to have a love interest, but after much correspondence between Gillette and Conan Doyle, Gillette finally asked if he could “marry Holmes.” Conan Doyle’s telegraphed response to this request is pithy and revelatory: “You may marry him, or murder or do what you like with him” (*Memories and Adventures* 87). While at times Conan Doyle clearly worked hard to preserve a particular image of the character, other moments found him frustrated with the detective and willing to allow much to be done that would otherwise seem unnecessary or perhaps damaging to the character. As a decision regarding effective maintenance of a product’s popularity, this response could have ended quite badly. Conan Doyle’s willingness to allow Gillette significant free reign may seem somewhat foolhardy, but the two had

exchanged numerous telegraph messages over several months and Conan Doyle had grown to trust the younger man, for better or worse.

In Gillette he was lucky, as the playwright and actor took most of his inspiration from the narratives already in place, combining and modifying them to fit the stage, spending significant time replicating the “look” of Sherlock Holmes as depicted by Sidney Paget that accompanied publications of Conan Doyle’s stories; Gillette himself fortuitously resembled Conan Doyle’s imagined version of the character. In fact, upon meeting Gillette for the first time, Conan Doyle saw him step out of the train “and Sherlock Holmes himself stepped onto the platform...the long spare figure with the aquiline features and deep-set eyes...Conan Doyle contemplated the apparition with open-mouthed awe” (Zecher 291). When the play was an incredible success, the “look” of Holmes was further reinforced by these references, and Gillette’s inclusion of the deerstalker cap (from Paget), the magnifying glass (from Conan Doyle), the violin (from Conan Doyle), and even the syringe (also Conan Doyle) strengthened the network of signification surrounding the character—not to mention the use of famous characters and scenes, from Moriarty and Irene Adler to the ever-loyal Watson. On top of these famous components, Gillette created the “Elementary” line for Holmes as noted in my introduction and changed Holmes’s straight pipe to a curved, bent-briar style, supposedly because it made his mouth easier to see for the audience (Zecher 344). Gillette’s play relied upon the signifiers that came before (both those of Conan Doyle and the additions of Paget) but his work added to these significantly and established them with emphasis. Despite the play’s failure to stick to Conan Doyle’s requirements and canon (Holmes falls in love, melodrama abounds, and Moriarty is a spineless foe instead of a worthy

arch-enemy), its popularity promulgated a vision of Holmes that was quite similar to that of the canon and the images of Holmes produced in *The Strand*. In fact, the narrative divergences from the original are largely forgotten in the wake of the image produced by Gillette. Holmes scholars do not often remember the play for its failure to produce an “accurate” story but instead for the “image” produced by Gillette.

The play, eventually titled *Sherlock Holmes – A Drama in Four Acts*,<sup>9</sup> was performed regularly as simply *Sherlock Holmes*, premiering in 1899 and appearing in various runs through 1932. By the time of his death, Gillette had performed the title role approximately one thousand three hundred times and had authorized others to perform the play in licensed runs throughout Europe and as far away as Australia (Zecher 582). The material was popular enough that others plagiarized it regularly, and Gillette’s agent spent a significant amount of time tracking down and closing such unlicensed performances (Zecher 180). The performance continued the work of consolidating a specific version of Holmes for its audiences, moving Conan Doyle’s work from the text to the stage in an extraordinarily faithful representation—visually if not in terms of plot. Gillette’s work is of particular ongoing importance, as the look of the character would transfer from the stage to the screen quite effectively. The theater was a valuable source for film adaptations of a variety of texts, including *Sherlock Holmes*, and film scholar Rick Altman establishes the importance of understanding this association in his “Dickens, Griffith, and Film Theory Today” (1989).

In this essay Altman focuses largely on the stylistic and thematic links between popular melodramatic theater and the great novels that they adapted. In doing so, he teases out the inherent melodrama of the classic novel and its value for analysis of film

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<sup>9</sup> It was also briefly known as *Sherlock Holmes, or The Strange Case of Miss Faulkner*.

adaptations of the same novel, situating them in that tradition. To understand the relationship between a novel and its movie adaptation, the play's version of the novel must be inserted into the narrative—a claim that few film critics had considered before publication of his essay. For Altman, “By eschewing the more popular serial forms and theatrical adaptations, critics abandon the opportunity to understand what is going on beneath and within the classical aspects of Hollywood narrative” (157-158). To build the classical Hollywood narrative, the theater is a necessary component, despite the difficulties its ephemerality creates. And though Altman's argument applies primarily to the narrative of the Hollywood style, the skeleton of the assertion remains a valuable perspective for the work in this section. Gillette's play in particular, and perhaps the plays that came before, and the plays that were *not* made, have all had a significant impact on the visual image of Holmes and the cultural awareness of the character. Much like the melodrama from which the classic Hollywood style came, the plays were a crucible in which part of the character of Holmes was refined. When combined with others, such as that of the illustration history and eventually the films, the various materials consolidated into the alloy that would later serve as the base from which other texts could be formed.

In 1916 Gillette performed the role of Sherlock Holmes in a film version of his play, titled *Sherlock Holmes*. By that time at least twenty other films featuring Sherlock Holmes in various forms, both adaptations of the canon and entirely new pastiches, had been produced, but as Altman suggests, the theater's impact on the cinema was established even before Gillette stood in front of the camera. Alan Barnes's study of film portrayals of Holmes explores these early films and many other movies, observing that in the early days of silent film, “with copyright law in its infancy, anyone could plagiarize

Conan Doyle” (Barnes 312). A significant number of plagiarized editions of Holmes stories existed and famously frustrated Conan Doyle, and the films in Barnes’s book bear his claim out<sup>10</sup>; that said, it might be more accurate to say that copyright law had significant problems adapting to the new technology of film and had not yet developed the apparatus necessary to allow rights holders to pursue claims effectively. While many such plagiarized films appeared in the first part of the twentieth century, by the middle of the nineteen-teens all of the films listed in Barnes’s chronology appear as either authorized adaptations, pastiches, or parodies—primarily as adaptation. This early moment, at the beginning of cinema’s spread, was a dangerous time for the character of Sherlock Holmes, whose identity as a visual icon was not yet fully established.

The period before effective copyright policing of the cinema appears to have been an anarchic time, where the difficulties of producing film were the primary impediments to the presentation of narratives on screen. Filmmakers such as Viggo Larsen and Otto Lagoni made several movies in Germany and Denmark featuring the detective in narratives from the canon as well as in new pastiches. Both countries had been early adopters of Holmes stories, with translations of the Conan Doyle originals available in Denmark in 1893 and in Germany in 1894; both countries also produced a number of pastiches featuring the detective written in their native language, with two hundred thirty new stories featuring Holmes produced in Germany in the space of four years from 1907-1911 (Barnes 32, 220). In his research into silent films featuring Sherlock Holmes, Barnes found that

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<sup>10</sup> Barnes provides *The Hypnotic Detective* (1912) as an example, in which reviewers at the time were happy to “greet our old friend Mr Sherlock Holmes,” but noted confusion in his decision to sport “a long moustache and...monacle,” a pair of details that led them to the conclusion “that the presentation has not been authorised by either Sir Arthur Conan Doyle or the publishers of his books” (312) even though the plot of the movie was taken directly from a Holmes story.

In the 1910s, particularly in Europe, the terms ‘Sherlock Holmes’ and ‘detective’ became more-or-less synonymous...the British Hepworth short *The Coiner’s Den* (1912), which in its original form featured only an anonymous ‘Detective’...screened in Germany under the title *Sherlock Holmes im Kampfe mit Falschmünzern* (‘Sherlock Holmes in a battle with counterfeiters’). (312)

The link with Hockensmith’s assertion that Holmes has become a genre “unto himself” cannot go unnoticed here, and the research Barnes provides suggests that the relationship between the detective and his genre was fluid far earlier than Hockensmith’s twenty-first century claim. The translation from English to other languages may have facilitated such mutability, but the confusion was relatively short-lived, existing primarily during the period where copyright was under-policed in film. By the nineteen-teens no such texts were produced according to Barnes, but the moment wherein Holmes was synonymous with his genre stands as a testament to both the popularity of Holmes (or at least his name) and ease with which the name could be associated with a broader style of storytelling. At the turn of the century Holmes was nearly generic, but the enforcement of copyright laws and the “taming” of the cinema provided space for the detective to become a coherent figure with effective signifying cues all his own.

Though moving away from a perception of Holmes as synonymous with detectives to a more structured focus on adaptation and limited pastiche may seem like a backward step, this development solidified the signifying links from which a more permanent idea of Holmes and a Holmes-esque story could be woven. Had an open field of adaptation and pastiche remained the rule, the breadth of characteristics shared between “detectives” and “Holmes” would been too wide to be useful; Holmes would signify detective in the way that “Xerox” has become a verb for producing a physical copy of a paper, a relatively formless signifier. Though this might be desirable in certain

cases, it would dilute the detective too greatly to be useful as a touchstone—there would be no simple code with which Holmes could be invoked. The work to re-establish control over presentations of the detective was certainly good business, but it was also an effective way to ensure that the work done by Conan Doyle, Paget, and Gillette was not undone. Here, though not immediately effective, the eventual ability of copyright to provide protection against unauthorized use of the character allowed the Conan Doyle family to assert control over the character's appearance and thus its signification network. Copyright preserved the character's visual identity. Holmes would retain his most famous characteristics, and those features would only grow more closely associated with him throughout the first part of the twentieth century.

The number of films, radio plays, and television series starring Holmes proliferated after Sir Arthur's death, and his status as "the most portrayed fictional human character" is not at all exaggerated. On the screen, from the end of the canon's publication to the transfer of the copyright to Princess Nina M'divani in 1970, no less than thirty-four different movie adaptations and pastiches of the character were produced; six television series also aired (Barnes 317-318). Just as Conan Doyle willingly allowed creators such as Gillette to explore his character in other media, his sons were equally prepared to push the detective into film and television—though the licensed materials show a careful attention to ensuring that Holmes remained tightly associated with the signifiers that their father and other early contributors had created. Denis and Adrian achieved a balance between signification and restricted proliferation that proved successful, with adaptation and pastiche of the canon in media such as film, radio, and eventually television providing an outlet for both participating in the construction of a



Holmes signification network while retaining a core of printed texts that served as a foundation for all fans and readers. The interplay between the two and the length and depth of the conversation between them is the engine through which Holmes becomes best understood as genre and not character.

This does not imply that there were no text pastiches of Holmes published in Conan Doyle's life or during his sons' stewardship of the character. Denis and Adrian attempted to maintain the sanctity of the canon, with Adrian famously refusing to publish a supposedly "lost" manuscript in 1945 for fear that it was not truly written by his father (*Nova 57 Minor*). At the same time, Adrian clearly harbored some belief in his own writing ability, having published a number of Holmes stories in the 1950s with the help of John Dickson Carr, primarily filling in some of the stories Watson mentioned in the canon but that were never written by Sir Arthur. In general, other writers were not permitted to create their own pastiches using Holmes. Numerous stories appeared in various publications, but in *The Alternative Sherlock Holmes* (2003), a fascinating and useful list of parodies and pastiches featuring Holmes and other characters in the canon, Peter Ridgeway Watt and Joseph Green note that "pastiche ... appeared slowly at first...[as] the Conan Doyle estate could come down hard on pastiches that used Holmes'[s] name" (77). Collecting the texts from two categories, those expanding on stories Watson mentioned explicitly and those that simply featured Holmes without mention in the canon,<sup>11</sup> Watt and Green's text illustrates that despite the rights holders'

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<sup>11</sup> These two categories are the most important for this project, though Green and Watt also include an extensive list of parodies and narratives featuring Holmes outside of the canonical bounds; these texts are not included in the count here.

wishes, numerous pastiches were written as early as 1893,<sup>12</sup> and, depending on how the count is made, between one hundred and one hundred thirty such narratives were produced during Sir Arthur and his son's control of the copyright.

These fictions, both allowed and litigated against, bear a fascinating relationship to the Holmes canon, something Watt and Green clearly recognized in their distinction between pastiches that fill in gaps mentioned by Watson and those simply telling their own tale; the former allows the reader into the act of narration. Many of Watson's opening comments when beginning the narration of a case include references to cases that he never wrote but that were part of his creations' fictional lives. This hint that the characters had lives outside of that related on the page provided imaginative space for the reader; "the giant rat of Sumatra" (from "The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire," 1924), "the adventure of the Paradol Chamber" (from "Five Orange Pips," 1891), and "that little affair of the Vatican cameos" (from *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, 1901) are mentioned in passing by Watson, and readers became writers in an attempt to fill the gaps. In his essay "Fan Fictions on Sherlock Holmes," Michael Chabon recognizes the power of Conan Doyle's act, arguing that "enduring popular literature has this open-ended quality, and extends this invitation to the reader to continue, on his or her own, with the adventure" (44). These "magical gaps," as Chabon describes them (44), lure the reader into speculation, into wondering about what those other stories might have included, but in doing so they also imply a specific form for the tales. Here the canonical example becomes valuable, but it is not the only possible way of approaching the material. The important thing for writers and readers of such pastiches is that the texts themselves seem

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<sup>12</sup> This text, "The Late Sherlock Holmes," was written by James Barrie, friend of Sir Arthur and eventual creator of Peter Pan; Barrie would write several other pastiches of Holmes throughout his career.

“real,” that they are similar to the original narratives, or that they invoke the characters in a way that reminds readers of their identity while also bringing a new tale to light.

When looking across the vastness of the texts available to discuss, the tools used to describe a single Holmes story grow somewhat inadequate, requiring other frameworks of support to approach the continued creation of new adaptations. The incredible number of existing texts engaged with Holmes—Watt and Green suggest it is near twenty-five thousand (Watt 1)—has reached a point where the work of tracing their antecedents and referents is mind-numbingly difficult and potentially unnecessary. There is always the canon to fall back on for illuminating details, but when Basil Rathbone begins his work as Sherlock Holmes, a role he fulfilled in fourteen films over seven years (1939-1946), how much of his portrayal was inspired by Gillette’s play? How much by Conan Doyle’s original stories? This leaves aside the difficulty of finding inspiration in Gillette’s performance in the film version, which was revised six years later with the same title and similar plot but with a much younger John Barrymore in the title role—which of these was most striking to Rathbone? And how strongly did Rathbone’s performance affect later actors, such as Peter Cushing or Christopher Lee? The interlocking lines of influence and relation become virtually impossible to unravel, yet there remains a kind of “ideal” Holmes narrative fundamental to understanding all texts, including those of the canon.

Steve Neale, in his brilliant *Genre* (1980), provides a useful perspective with which to approach this in a quotation by Jean-Louis Leutrat:

The only way a genre model or genre rules can be said to exist is as...a memorial metatext and on that level alone. It is because viewers/readers operate with sets of expectations and levels of predictability that it is possible to perceive instances of

variation, repetition, rectification and modification. In this way, genre can be considered as one single continuous text. (Neale 51)

The “ideal” Holmes narrative is the “memorial metatext” in Leutrat’s (and Neale’s) formulation: an impossible construction that can be approached with various degrees of success—even if it is impossible to fully create or describe. The “instances of variation, repetition, rectification and modification” Leutrat lists describe attempts to write with respect to the “ideal” Holmes narrative, maintaining both a sense of expectations produced by prior texts and a desire to produce new material. For instance, Peter Cushing’s Holmes is one variation on the broader theme and will be judged not only on its creativity and difference from prior versions but also its fidelity to this ideal; Cushing’s Holmes-ness becomes an adjudicable quality.

Conan Doyle himself may have felt some of this pressure as well, as he writes of later stories in terms of their success and failure with respect to prior Holmes narratives, realizing when he approaches the “best” of the stories and always seeking to do so despite having difficulties finding that high mark.<sup>13</sup> The difficulties he faced are clarified in part by Neale’s extension of Leutrat, in which he recognizes that genre texts are “a question not of particular and exclusive elements, however defined, but of exclusive and particular combinations and articulations of elements” (Neale 23). Neale here makes explicit one of Leutrat’s implicit claims, clarifying that the “metatext” to which Leutrat refers is not something that is easily codified as a list of rules that provide material to include or exclude, depending on the genre in which an author wishes to write. Instead, the “exclusive and particular combinations and articulations of elements” are themselves

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<sup>13</sup> In particular, after he resurrected Holmes in 1903, he wrote about his stories at length, evaluating their quality with respect to the canon—and perhaps an ideal Holmes story that had not yet been written (*Conan Doyle: A Life in Letters* 513-517).

chosen from an extraordinarily large (if not infinite) set of choices that *in combination* create the effect of a genre. For Holmes stories this is extraordinarily useful, providing a sense that should a text fail to include one or more elements established in prior Holmes narratives, such an absence does not disqualify them from participating in the discussion; in fact, it may be impossible to include all of the signifiers of the Holmes story in a single text, or if possible it may be unwieldy and awkward.

Recognizing that the production of generic texts is not a completely open space for combination and exclusion, Neale also makes clear in multiple places that genres are quite limited in their ability to accept change, that they “institutionalize, guarantee coherence by institutionalizing conventions, i.e. sets of expectations with respect to narrative process and narrative closure which may be subject to variation but which are never exceeded or broken” (Neale 28). While any genre is flexible to a significant degree, there remain brittle points—particularly around “narrative process and narrative closure”—where certain rules must be obeyed because of their vital role within the narrative being constructed. For instance, it is impossible to imagine a serious, non-parodic presentation of Holmes that does not demonstrate his observational acumen or rely upon it to resolve the crime in question. This narrative moment is non-negotiable; its absence would utterly break the Holmes narrative in which it appears, even if other material, such as the escape of the guilty party or a missed clue or observation along the way, *might* be considered a violation of the Holmes form. It seems less forgivable for Holmes to fail at solving the mystery by the end of the story than for him to determine the solution but fail to capture the criminal—Holmes’ deductive skills must be irrefutable, if

not his ability to apprehend the culprit physically. He is not the police, and his ability to catch a criminal is less important than his deductive skill.

Agreeing with much of what Neale and Leutrat assert, John Cawelti describes genre literature in terms of “formula” and observes that “the power to employ stereotypical characters and situations in such a way as to breathe new life and interest into them is particularly crucial to formulaic art of high quality” (*Mystery, Adventure, and Romance* 11). Novelty is extraordinarily valuable to genre work, perhaps even more valuable than in broader categories of fiction, as the demands of “stereotypical characters and situations” make the creation of new material exceedingly difficult. Even though “the pleasure and effectiveness of an individual formulaic work depends on its intensification of a familiar experience” and “the formula [or genre] creates its own world with which we become familiar by repetition” (10), constant repetition is not enough. Sherlock Holmes cannot simply solve the same crime over and over—or if he must do so, as the numerous adaptations of novels like *The Hound of the Baskervilles* demonstrate,<sup>14</sup> other factors must change, be they actors (Peter Cushing’s 1959 version of the tale certainly differs from Matt Frewer’s 2000 adaptation), sets (the budget-constrained sets of a 1988 TV movie featuring Jeremy Brett pale in comparison to the wonderful direction and cinematography of 1939’s *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s The Hound of the Baskervilles*—the first time Basil Rathbone appeared as Holmes), dialogue (the determined fidelity to Conan Doyle’s original in a 1982 version—featuring Doctor Who’s Tom Baker as Holmes—versus Hammer Films’ far more engaging adaptation with Cushing), or other

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<sup>14</sup> Adaptations in English—including only adaptations actually using the same title—occurred in 1921, 1931, 1939, 1959, 1972 (TV), 1978, 1982 (TV), 1983 (TV), 1988 (TV), 2000 (TV), and 2002 (TV).

concerns.<sup>15</sup> Cawelti's treatment of genre clarifies the way later authors must approach the canon and the breadth of non-canonical texts as a question of novel approaches to a relatively static style.

In these authors' work a somewhat under-discussed factor appears in the background: quantity of material. When Cawelti discusses becoming "familiar by repetition" and Neale mentions "institutionalizing conventions," both invoke the importance of quantity implicitly; this factor deserves further exploration in this discussion of Holmes, as the second most commonly referenced name in ratiocinative detective fiction is Dupin, of whom there are only three stories. Factors such as the humanizing influence of Conan Doyle on the genre certainly made Holmes more approachable, but the sheer volume of Holmes stories must compare in influence. Had Poe written more Dupin stories, perhaps theorists would be discussing the genre of Dupin now in place of Holmes. That said, other ratiocinative detectives possess a higher page count than Holmes's canon, whose four novels and fifty-six short stories pale in comparison with Agatha Christie's Poirot, the subject of thirty-three novels and a significant number of short stories besides. Thus the size of the canonical material cannot be the only factor, and the breadth of Holmes narratives outside the canon must impact the question of narrative volume. Watson provides space for readers to imagine other stories of the great detective, and that space was filled quite readily—quickly taking up significant space in the imaginations of the public.

Through all of this the work of the rights holders may seem unimportant, but in his theorization of genre Neale recognizes the need to acknowledge the commercial side

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<sup>15</sup> Alan Barnes's *Sherlock Holmes on Screen* is an invaluable resource for those interested in version comparisons.

of textual production, remarking that “genres, of course, do exist within the context of a set of economic relations and practices, a fact often stressed by pointing out that they are the forms of the products of capitalist industry” (Neale 51). And though comments about the generic nature of a specific set of texts as tied to “capitalist industry” often come from critics of genre materials, awareness of these texts and characters as moneymaking enterprises must remain part of our understanding. Sir Arthur, Denis, and Adrian may have all been somewhat lucky in their decisions regarding the copyright on Sherlock Holmes narratives, but their decisions were quite intelligent in many places as well; the strength of the character that now exists is a testament to their actions. Neale claims that “genres exist not simply as a body of texts, or a body of textual conventions, but also as a set of expectations” (51), and these expectations belong to the audience and the culture at large; the rights holders for Sherlock Holmes managed these expectations and stoked cultural interest at the same time—a remarkable feat.

Holmes began his existence as Conan Doyle’s attempt to write something “new” in the vein of Poe’s Dupin, but over the course of the twentieth century he has become something far more—something that even Conan Doyle had difficulty living up to and to which that hours upon hours of screen time have been devoted: an idealized form of himself. Guessing as to when this occurred is unnecessary; during the first half of the twentieth century Holmes ceased being solely a member of the detective genre and became a style of storytelling broad enough to serve as exemplar for his narrow genre and perhaps to intrude upon detective literature more broadly. And while in the early part of the century the necessary number of signifiers needed to imply Holmes may have been relatively large (hat, magnifying glass, “Elementary,” deduction, violin, pipe, syringe, for



Gillette), the continued attention to the character has solidified these signifiers' relationship with the character such that the entire weight of Holmes's canon can be invoked with a single line of dialogue or a particular kind of hat placed on a nightstand. And in doing so, authors participate in the propagation of this signifying network and its implications; they are playing with Holmes.

A large measure of this network's success stems from the relatively limited generic space out of which Holmes grows and of which he is sometimes perceived as representing in its entirety. Though in some ways Holmes possesses strong ties to "detective fiction" generally, his is not the dominant image for the entire genre any longer; others such as Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe now form part of the conversation, and Holmes is restricted to a relatively limited style of detection: the ratiocinative. Within that field, however, Holmes has become almost completely dominant, owing primarily to the regular production of films and series featuring the character; as Tom Vanderbilt notes in his *New Yorker* article, one of the primary methods of ensuring continued popularity is to "be the object of a film" (Vanderbilt), by which he means being the central character of a popular film, and Holmes fulfills this requirement with gusto—again demonstrating the importance of the work done by his rights holders. That the ratiocinative detective is Holmes, a version of Holmes, or compared to Holmes is now obvious; he has become an adjective, a touchstone style—"Holmesian" is used to describe texts or productions that rely upon the style of detection and not simply the character, and if the concept of a "ratiocinative detective" is uncommon, most readers can describe the function of one by describing Holmes's methods for solving a case. But as this came into being, a shift in the copyright ownership changed the landscape of

Holmes-related publications, and a number of texts began to appear that used the character in new and interesting ways. After Conan Doyle's sons' stewardship of the character ended, his daughter-in-law and youngest daughter took the reins and brought about a new era of Holmes texts that allow for significant continued interest in the character and his future.

In moving to that discussion, it is important to remember that Holmes comes from the ratiocinative detective genre, and that although he critiques it in some ways the central function of the detective as a producer of meanings remains a part of the character throughout his appearances. This continues even as the detective moves across media and becomes more approachable through the lens of genre, as while the network of signification allows writers to reference an ideal "Holmes" about which their readers will know, an inescapable aspect of that character is his genre origin. These factors apply to the continuation of the character's existence and thus the ways in which the later copyright holders use their rights, and the following chapter will put them into further context.

## CHAPTER II

### THE ADVENTURE OF POSTMODERNITY AND TRADEMARKS

Why is Sherlock Holmes male? The fact of the character's maleness is not in question, as arguing otherwise would largely be a rhetorical exercise. Conan Doyle clearly wrote the character as a human male, and this project does not seriously challenge that creation. The question itself may seem somewhat trivial or spurious, but this superficial frivolity obscures the trickiness of providing a sufficient answer. As the prior chapter demonstrates, Conan Doyle based the character on a real person who also happened to be male, and his acknowledged fictional forebears were all male as well. Perhaps Conan Doyle's participation in the genre as it stood—despite his additions—continued his work of avoiding serious critique of or change to the assumptions of the genre. The “assumptions of the genre” then become the source of Holmes's being gendered male,<sup>1</sup> and the frivolity of the question is replaced by a far more useful subtext underlining the nature of genre fiction, historical origins, and the echo chamber of popular fiction. These avenues of inquiry highlight a potential for deeper layers under an initially trivial question, but for the most part a serious examination of these assumptions begins primarily with the postmodern movement of the second half of the twentieth century.

Postmodernism in literature, though extremely difficult to describe in full, often begins with challenges to master narratives, the supposedly “true” descriptions of

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<sup>1</sup> Though books such as James Ware's *The Female Detective* (1864, written under the pseudonym Andrew Forrester) predate Holmes by a significant margin and a significant number of Holmes's contemporaries were women, the genre as a whole tends toward a masculine assumption. Nick Rennison, in his *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes* (2008) treats the existence of these female detectives as an attempt to create “unique selling points” that differentiate their material from other options in the genre (14).

fundamental relationships and explanations of causal chains frequently associated with science and history. In doing so, its comprehensive disputation with these deep-seated beliefs results in a ripple of similar questions outside the initial area of investigation, spilling into areas with tangential relation to the questions, including the realm of genre fiction. For many early such theorists, the mechanics and values of the detective genre became a useful area of study, and though not considering themselves postmodern, structuralist critics like Franco Moretti and Tzvetan Todorov questioned the fundamental makeup of the genre in ways that laid its assumptions bare. Their contributions, discussed primarily in the prior chapter, clarify the function of the detective as a cultural figure, but this project uses their insight to better understand the forces of the genre, especially in its most elemental form. These authors' arguments did not remain exclusively within the realm of theory, and some writers working within the genre encountered questions quite similar to those of the critics, consciously or not. The texts produced after the postmodern period, while sometimes mere repetitions of the classic detective formula, just as often incorporated the concerns of the postmodern turn, changing the way detectives like Sherlock Holmes functioned. This chapter will provide an understanding of the relationship between their efforts and the possibility of their efforts' publication, as the Holmes copyright ownership history becomes more complicated after the death of Sir Arthur's last son, Adrian; despite these complications a great many particularly interesting Holmes stories became possible.

Throughout this chapter the intersection of interests between artists investigating Holmes's character and copyright owners seeking to effectively use the character as a product will be of significant interest. The overlap between these groups led to a more

inquisitive attitude about the character of Sherlock Holmes, where the basic characteristics of the detective faced significant criticism. However, as these stories tend to remain within the framework of the ratiocinative detective genre (echoing Conan Doyle's original contributions), the critical work done by these texts faced serious limitations imposed by the desire to present Holmes and his efforts in a positive light. This contradiction represents a significant component of the textual investigations in chapters three, four and five, as the later texts rely on a positive portrayal of Holmes while critiquing and expanding the character in fascinating ways. Laying the groundwork for those later explorations, this chapter will help to explain the changes in both literary landscape and character ownership that have allowed these paradoxical uses of Sherlock Holmes to occur, while also looking toward the future of the character's ownership situation. Unfortunately, the convergence of attitudes that have produced such interesting material may prove to be a relatively short-lived phenomenon, primarily due to the transition to a new form of intellectual property control: trademark. Bearing these concerns in mind, this chapter will explore both the clear positive impact and potential negative effect of continued intellectual property protection, all while elaborating on the central paradox of a postmodern Holmes.

The transfer of the Sherlock Holmes copyright to Princess Nina Mdiviani and Dame Jean Conan Doyle opens the first section, wherein expanded opportunities to pastiche Holmes first appear. These new possibilities stem from a cultural shift toward postmodernism, changing the narrative impetus for stories featuring the detective from around 1970 through the present. Neither Adrian nor Denis ever used their copyright authority with the free hand that Princess Nina and Dame Jean applied, making both eras

of stewardship of the character quite interesting for modern understandings of Holmes. It would have been difficult for either woman to allow the character to be used so creatively had not Conan Doyle and his sons established such a firm base from which to work. Once Holmes became a well-known figure of popular culture, the opening of the copyright to new and often critical uses reinvigorated the character, perhaps beginning with Nicholas Meyer's *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* (1974). The perspective on Holmes that Meyer and later writers brought owed a great deal to the postmodern shift in literature occurring around this time, and the texts that have followed in Meyer's footsteps have cannily interrogated Holmes's sanity, ability, and altruism. This current era places Holmes in conversation with contemporary cultural concerns stemming from a shift in the dominant thinking strategies beginning in the 1970s, and the texts discussed in later chapters were all produced during this time. As the discussion below will show, they would not exist without the intersection of changes in the literary landscape alongside the changes in ownership of Holmes; the two are interrelated.

The second portion of this chapter explores the state of the copyright alongside the questions that have been opened by the postmodern turn. Though critical of the work Holmes can do as a producer of meaning, non-parodic texts featuring the detective take his abilities and conclusions quite seriously. As later textual explorations will demonstrate and this segment sketches, the reverence with which Holmes is approached makes a critique of his abilities a fascinating moment of literary negotiation, wherein the models of the past are not thrown away but find themselves in a new framework. This occurs primarily due to the nature of Holmes's genre roots, as the meaning production so central to his character can no longer be taken at face value but is not discarded either.

Alongside this overview of later material, this section provides a sense of what future changes in the copyright of the character might bring. As the copyright on Holmes will soon expire, the current rights holders intend to move toward a more trademark-centered ownership model, which has the potential for a dramatic impact on the ways the character is used and policed. Much of this discussion is speculative, though there are many cases upon which to base probable concern; the legal issues surrounding ownership of the character continue to directly impact its ability to participate in discussions of issues outside the canonical frame. The narratives under discussion in later chapters are potentially endangered by this change.

These two sections complete the foundation for the final material in this project, allowing readers to more completely understand the fascinating position of Sherlock Holmes in the twenty-first century. The contradictory impulses between respect for the character and a desire to challenge its assumptions become more easily visible when it is placed alongside the framework of postmodern intervention, and the classic genre function of the detective as explainer continues to work—not despite of, but in large measure due to, this tension. Simultaneously, the legal conditions necessary for this to occur remain a potent force currently impacting the current outpouring of creative uses for Sherlock Holmes. Though for the moment the administration of the Holmes copyright by the Conan Doyle Estate has allowed the character to flourish, the Estate's plan to rely upon trademark in place of copyright may have significant consequences for the breadth of possible Holmes narratives. This chapter is meant neither to provoke fear of copyright nor agitate for its reform; however, the continued creation of Holmes narratives will

neatly illustrate the impact that character ownership can have on a creation's cultural relevance.

### **Tracking into Postmodernism**

In the last quarter of the twentieth century the ownership of the Holmes copyright underwent a drastic change, with the death of Adrian Conan Doyle in 1970 and the acquisition of the rights by Princess Nina Mdivani, the wife of his brother Denis (Itzkoff). Mdivani's replacement of Adrian resulted in an increased permissiveness regarding pastiches using Holmes, as she demonstrated no writerly pretensions of any sort. Her tenure as rights-holder was short-lived, as her inability to maintain payments on the loan with which she purchased the rights resulted in the transition of ownership to the Royal Bank of Scotland (Itzkoff). From there, a complicated web of legal maneuvering occurred, the most important part of which happened after the passage of the Copyright Law of 1976, allowing the only surviving descendant of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Air Commandant Dame Lena Annette Jean Conan Doyle, more widely known as Jean Conan Doyle, to reacquire the rights for her family (Itzkoff; Peck 17-18).<sup>2</sup> Though Princess Nina and Dame Jean approached the material differently, with Nina considering the Holmes copyright primarily a means through which to make money and Jean treating the character as a valued family inheritance, Dame Jean continued Mdivani's relaxed attitude toward pastiche (Lellenberg Interview). Though no specific sources describe their actions

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<sup>2</sup> A more complicated story could begin here, focusing upon the purchase of the rights from the Royal Bank of Scotland in 1976 by Sheldon Reynolds and the subsequent legal challenges made against the Conan Doyle estate by his ex-wife, Andrea Plunkett, who claims to possess the rights to the characters. Though this is a fascinating tale of copyright law and complex inheritances, it is less important to our understanding of Holmes' history, particularly because neither Reynolds nor Plunkett authorized many texts of significance; their role would fit a different project, perhaps one more interested in the vagaries of copyright law.



as a general policy, under the women's care texts featuring Holmes that were not licensed directly were served with cease and desist orders, then allowed to acquire a license for a fee and begin publication—assuming their work was acceptable. While Dame Jean oversaw the use of her father's character in such whimsical films such as *Young Sherlock Holmes* (1985) and *Without a Clue* (1988), Princess Nina authorized the publication of Nicholas Meyer's *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* (1974), which stands as the first serious example of a new approach toward the detective: growing suspicion of Holmes' deductive capabilities and character and a willingness to question the breadth of the great detective's abilities.<sup>3</sup>

The expansion of Holmes narratives beyond new media retellings and tightly controlled adaptations of the first half of the twentieth century resulted in such a breadth of texts that genre theory best describes them, but it is important to recognize that the work of Conan Doyle and his sons established the centerpiece around which these later texts would appear. The rights holders after Adrian no longer needed to maintain a careful watch over their character to ensure that the Sherlock Holmes signifying network remained consistent, which resulted in the licensing of material that might have been denied in the past. This decision was crucial to the continuing popularity of the figure, allowing a release of stories that were not only bottled up through the limitations placed on texts featuring the detective prior to this, but also fit a significant change in the cultural dialogue: postmodernism. The narratives produced under Princess Nina and Dame Jean did not *all* explore the postmodern engagement with new approaches toward knowledge, but many of them did, particularly Nicholas Meyer's *The Seven-Per-Cent*

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<sup>3</sup> Lellenberg noted that Dame Jean would have been just as willing as Princess Nina to authorize *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* in the interview he contributed to this project.

*Solution*, which questioned Holmes's incredible skills, echoing new perceptions of genre and knowledge in the postmodern approach. Crucially, both the relaxation of the rights holders' grip on Holmes *and* the suspicion of the assumptions supporting the detective genre were needed to ensure Holmes's continued popularity, and it is from the concurrence of these two events that contemporary authors have been able to use Holmes to participate in discussions surrounding issues important to the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. However, as the previous sections have demonstrated, this would not have been possible without the clear image of Holmes created by Conan Doyle and his sons' efforts.

By the time Princess Nina and Dame Jean permitted authors to play with the form of the Holmes story and even the character of Sherlock himself, the character was already a well-known touchstone of popular culture. Simply being well-known would not be enough for the character to persist in a robust fashion, however, and despite their different motivations, the two women's permissive attitude toward the character helped reinvigorate the detective for contemporary readers. Steve Neale reads this reinvention of character within a set of proscribed situations as a feature of genre work in and of itself:

The notion that 'all westerns (or all gangster films, or all war films, or whatever) are the same' is not just an unwarranted generalization, it is profoundly wrong: if each text within a genre were, literally, the same, there would simply not be enough difference to generate either meaning or pleasure. Hence there would be no audience. Difference is absolutely essential to the economy of genre. As Jacques Lacan stressed, 'Repetition demands the new.' (Neale 49-50)

Neale's position implies the importance of minor details of plot that are often left out of broader structuralist interpretations of genre, but for this study the claim that an absence of sufficient differences between texts would fail to "generate either meaning or pleasure" resonates more usefully. If left in Adrian's hands—or placed under the

supervision of another conservative owner—Holmes’s later stories may have continued to find an audience but would have been forced into the more focused and limited realms of difference that separate the cases taken by the detective. Instead of this development, which seems fair to categorize as significantly less capable of holding the attention of the popular imagination, a broader range to play with the narratives was encouraged by Princess Nina and Dame Jean.

This adjustment precipitates a discussion of the interactions between differentiation (micro versus macro, perhaps) and accessibility (fan-accessible versus layman-accessible), since even though Holmes was a well-known cultural icon only some of the details of his fictional life can be considered common knowledge. The difference between the two kinds of accessibility is relatively clear, with fan-accessible material being that which true enthusiasts would recognize and understand and layman-accessible material being more broadly available to those who are familiar only with general expectations for the form in question. Fans would know about Holmes’ drug addiction and how it appears in the canon, while laymen are aware of the general structure of the mystery, the Holmes/Watson partnership, and deductive tools likely displayed. Differentiation between texts is perhaps more complicated, but for the purposes of this study it reflects a level of difference to be found between one instance of a genre and another, and at the micro level could apply to a change in deductive methods used from one story to the next; a macro difference would then be a change in the broader focus, theme, or structure between texts. These are not mutually exclusive components, and a text can be accessible to both fans and laymen and include micro and macro differences. However, the changes at the micro level are more likely to be fan-accessible, while

changes at the macro level are more likely to be accessible to both fan and layman alike. This model explains why the change in Holmes ownership and resultant expansion of Holmes pastiche kept the Holmes form/genre within the public imagination; pastiche that is aware of and willing to explore the assumptions and ideas scaffolding the Holmes narrative itself approach the form in a way that laymen can access with ease. Had the publications remained constrained to sheer adaptation, the minutiae of differences possible within the limited form would be understandable only by fans that painstakingly traced these minor differences, and Holmes narratives could have quickly slid into a niche from which it would be difficult to escape—especially as time outside of laymen’s access would hasten the obscurity of the Holmes form. Neale’s quotation of Lacan could perhaps be amended to “*Interesting repetition demands an accessible and regular new.*”<sup>4</sup>

From this perspective, the transition of ownership away from Adrian and resultant permissive attitude was the most effective method of maintaining interest in the character at the popularly accessible level, and understanding this distinction provides a window into understanding the importance of the shift in terms of maintaining Sherlock Holmes’s cultural capital. As an example, a text like Meyer’s *Seven-Per-Cent Solution* provides a mystery for Holmes to solve using his unique talents but wraps this narrative within a playful exploration of the reader’s expectations for a Holmes story. Briefly, the novel provides a “lost” manuscript of Dr. Watson in which he describes the “true” story behind the appearance of Professor Moriarty, the narrative of which he had suppressed because of its connection to a separate figure, Dr. Sigmund Freud. In Meyer’s novel, Holmes had

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<sup>4</sup> The concept of mapping accessibility alongside differentiation deserves a more detailed exploration, with investigations into possible temporal impacts on the fan/layman distinction (including attendant historical/generational shifts in categorizations of micro and macro differences) and further analysis of intersections between separate “fan” groups as another method of maintaining attention (the Lovecraft/Conan Doyle “cross-overs” are worth considering for this).

grown paranoid due to abuse of the “seven-per-cent solution” of cocaine, and the detective was persecuting a local mathematician by the name of Moriarty, asserting that this math tutor was a criminal mastermind. Fearing for his friend’s sanity and health, Watson tricks Holmes into travelling to Vienna, where he and Freud help Holmes gain some control over his addiction. In the process, a mystery regarding a potential war is uncovered, and a newly sober Holmes must unravel it to prevent the outbreak of hostilities.

The novel relies on a number of differences from the standard form: instead of a Watson faithfully recording Holmes's exploits, the detective's companion describes how he has kept certain truths hidden, even from Holmes; instead of a (nearly) infallible Holmes, drug use has addled the great detective's mind such that he has invented his most feared villain; instead of a setting based upon but separate from the real world, Holmes and Watson not only meet Sigmund Freud but rely upon his help to save Holmes from the worst consequences of addiction. Though much of what makes the novel exciting stems from its play with the Holmes form, doing this within a framework that fans will find acceptable is incredibly important and difficult, especially when altering the expected and canonical narratives as drastically as Meyer does. The text must balance a number of changes to the expected Holmes form against a respect (if not reverence) for it, such as placing “revelations” of the effects of Holmes's drug use on the detective's skills alongside sufficient demonstration of those skills—and such strategies need not be (in fact are unlikely to be) universally effective, with some fan groups finding them acceptable and others complaining bitterly. This balancing act reveals a third axis in the discussion of expanded pastiche: acceptability, which complements accessibility and

differentiation, measuring the audience's consent to the changes in the text, appreciating the narrative as a pastiche that follows some of the (or perhaps the most important) genre's rules regarding the character. This is not the same as verisimilitude, having less to do with representing our reality than Holmes's reality, though some overlap may exist with suspension of disbelief.<sup>5</sup>

On a formal level all pastiches that play with the form of the Holmes story contend with the interrelatedness of altering the form and violating its rules, especially as the rules of the form are not fully codified in a specific way. In suggesting both that Moriarty is not a real villain and that Holmes's drug addiction and childhood trauma led him to falsely accuse his former math tutor, *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* deviates wildly from the original stories, most especially "The Final Problem" (1893) and "The Adventure of the Empty House" (1903), both of which rely upon Moriarty or his remaining henchmen to advance the plot. Meyer's departure from the canon must be made acceptable for his readers, and thus a set of "facts" from the Conan Doyle originals can be—*must* be—brought to bear to enhance the acceptability of the changes. In this case they include the abruptness of Moriarty's appearance and disappearance in the canon (all of which occurs in "The Final Problem") and contemporary readers' awareness of the effects of drug addiction. The first of these relies upon the audience's knowledge of and critical attentiveness to the oddness surrounding Moriarty, alongside both the recognition of Conan Doyle's desire to stop writing Holmes stories and his creation of the arch-nemesis as a method of doing so. If readers treat the narrative as a "true" part of

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<sup>5</sup> Suspension of disbelief is closer because of its insistence on the acceptance of a counter-factual presence in a work of art; the acceptability axis proposed here is self-referential and applies only to the degree to which a narrative possesses sufficient "fit" with other narratives set in the same universe and has a particular value when considering situations of canonical versus pastiched texts.

Holmes's "life" and not just a hiccup in the stories' production, it is strange to imagine that Holmes would have never mentioned a character as pernicious as Moriarty before "The Final Problem" or that the defeat of the villain would occur so quickly. Meyer's text resolves this conundrum by removing the character of Moriarty as a villain and using Holmes's well-established cocaine addiction as a cause for this—neatly building greater acceptability by relying on the canonical detail of cocaine abuse to support the alteration. Meyer's efforts also alleviate fans' possible concerns regarding the nature of Moriarty and the stories in which he appears, using Watson's narration to acknowledge their confusion: "I have just re-read the cases and marvel, I must confess, at my lack of subtlety. How could attentive readers have missed my overbearing emphasis on 'the truth' that I claimed to be telling?" (Meyer 17). The fans had missed no such thing; the novel plays their awareness of the stories against them to establish their willingness to accept the new narrative—an extremely clever maneuver that increases the enjoyability of the book alongside its acceptability.

Other changes, such as the inclusion of Freud, are extensions of the implicit belief that Sherlock Holmes works in the "real" world and operates under the constraints of reality. Thus, a more realistic take on drug addiction, in which Holmes cannot simply take cocaine whenever he is bored without there being negative side effects, and the inclusion of other "real-world" people such as Freud are not major challenges to the acceptability of the narrative. Although similar things do not happen in Conan Doyle's originals, there is sufficient focus on the "real" that it is possible to imagine them happening without difficulty. Put another way, if Holmes can reference Queen Victoria—even if only obliquely—or the science of fingerprinting, then his awareness of

psychological techniques and the nightmare of drug addiction cannot be far removed.

More attentive readers may find additional evidence for this reading of the material, such as Watson's much later discussion of Holmes' "conquered" addiction in "The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter" (1904):

For years I had gradually weaned him from that drug mania which had threatened once to check his remarkable career. Now I knew that under ordinary conditions he no longer craved for this artificial stimulus, but I was well aware that the fiend was not dead but sleeping, and I have known that the sleep was a light one and the waking near when in periods of idleness I have seen the drawn look upon Holmes's ascetic face, and the brooding of his deep-set and inscrutable eyes. (*New Annotated Stories* 1124)

Though there is a contradiction here in the source of Holmes' help (Watson certainly does not credit Freud elsewhere in the canon and takes the credit himself here), Meyer's text evades the need for such explanation through Watson's reasons for hiding the truth of Moriarty and the extent of his friend's addiction, that "the reason for the delay is that there was another party in the case," Dr. Freud, and Holmes had "enjoin[ed] me—under the strictest of oaths—to disclose nothing of the matter until such time as this second party had also ceased to breathe" (16). Certainly this is not the first or the last time in which a fictitious desire to preserve the reputation of a character is used to justify a delay in publication, and perhaps it is the very plausibility of this concern that has maintained its use. In any case, the desire to preserve Freud's privacy is eminently believable, fitting into a sense of the "realistic" form of Holmes's narratives and cleverly acknowledging the extensive restrictions on quoting from Freud's unpublished papers.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Though a substantial collection of Freud's papers are collected at The Library of Congress, access to them is not easily acquired and confidentiality of the records is often cited for this inaccessibility; a minor controversy erupted in the late 1970s and early 1980s when a new director revealed what he felt were serious flaws in Freud's own logic, based upon unreleased notes and statements. The details appear in Janet Malcolm's *In the Freud Archives* (1984).



Furthering this claim, Watson's discussion of Holmes's continued status as an addict, suffering as he does from a "fiend [that] was not dead but sleeping," is a strikingly modern assessment. Its very modernity lends credence to Meyer's text by establishing a link between canonical discussion of drug "mania" and more current understanding of the same. The reading audience—particularly those fans aware of Watson's presentation of the addiction—can see the progressive stance toward drug abuse in this early twentieth century text, making Meyer's movement toward psychoanalytic methods of addiction management a natural extension. Freud's treatment of Holmes not only brings in another fascinating figure that provided a bridge between Victorian and twentieth century models of understanding the world, it is a natural, "real" outgrowth of the Holmes texts themselves. Meyer manages to brilliantly pastiche Holmes by relies upon the "real world" to reduce concerns about the changes he makes, improving his text's acceptability while also tapping into recent interest in Freud's treatment of cocaine addiction, the details of which first appeared in English, just before Meyer's book was written, through Steven A. Edminster's translation in *Cocaine Papers* (1963).

Fascinating as they are, the novel's changes to the Holmes form also illustrate a fundamental contradiction, as the author invokes the realities of a rational world to demonstrate that even the greatest fictional empiricist can be irrational. Though Meyer's text insists upon a strong "real world" effect that explains the poor quality of "The Final Problem" and the nature of Holmes's struggle against the seven-per-cent solution, that very claim undermines the rationality of Sherlock Holmes himself. In particular, by showing Holmes's irrational persecution of the "arch-criminal" Moriarty to be a delusion brought on by drug abuse and a belief that his father murdered his mother and committed

suicide because of an affair that his mother had with math tutor, Moriarty (Meyer 214-216). It is as though reason dictates that even the most rational of truths must be at some level irrational, partial, or tied to addiction and madness. Freud's intervention is thus a patch on a larger problem of understanding that Meyer's text reveals as resting at the heart of Holmes's logic itself.

Such internal contradiction in formal constructions does not exist solely within Holmes narratives or even mystery literature in general, and an important statement to pair with the implications of Meyer's text can be found in Jacques Derrida's "The Law of Genre" (1980). In it, Derrida explodes the concept of "purity...[that] is a law of the law of genre" (Derrida 57) by demonstrating the intermingling of genres occurring in all texts, regardless of any desire to categorize them as part of any single, specific genre.<sup>7</sup> Though much of the essay challenges this "purity" of genre in terms of a more classical definition (epic, lyric, novel, etc.), the sense of genre as a "limit" that must be obeyed applies to popular genres as well:

As soon as the word "genre" is sounded...a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind. "Do," "Do not" says "genre," the word "genre," the figure, the voice, or the law of genre. (Derrida 56)

The structuralist approach toward popular genre hews quite closely to this sense of prohibitions and exclusions in its attempt to define the boundaries within which texts must operate to fit one genre or another, and though more recent work, such as that of Neale, recognizes the importance of explorations of new combinations it does not dispute certain limits. By acknowledging this prohibition at the beginning, Derrida can explore the function and limitations of this inclusion/exclusion strategy, treating it as a process

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<sup>7</sup> See Rick Altman's *Film/Genre* (1999) and Gary K. Wolfe's *Evaporating Genres* (2011) for a more detailed look at the difficulties of genre classification.

with consequences that diminish attentiveness to the fabricated, partial nature of the generic boundaries.

To illustrate the importance of understanding the impact of these interdictions, Derrida unpacks Maurice Blanchot's *La Folie du jour* in terms of the text's unwillingness to submit to the limits of the law of genre. He shows that the text is unruly, constraining itself within generic limits while also making those limits plain to the reader; in this text the genre "law...is a silhouette that plays...at being born like anybody and no body" (Derrida 79). The spacing is quite striking here, suggesting the dual nature of genre law as both a rule with the potential to exist ("*anybody*") without existing ("*no body*"). Genre is cast as an intangible fiction that becomes tangible in its facticity, and any attempt to treat the constraints of genre as an unassailable law must see in their construction the remnant of that which they exclude. Such a realization is no longer as striking as it may have once been, but Derrida's assertion that "genre...has always been able to play the role of order's principle: resemblance, analogy, identity and difference, taxonomic classification, organization and genealogical tree, order of reasons, sense of sense, truth of truth, natural light and sense of history" still carries weight when the two concepts are put together. If genre is the "sense of sense, truth of truth," its existence as more "silhouette" than reality is not a claim for its dismissal but instead either an argument for awareness of source or a realization that the source of the silhouette cannot be fixed.

At the end of his essay, Derrida asserts that the contradiction of the very idea of genre, its role as a boundary that is acknowledged and thus reframed by texts it purports to describe, reveals that "the law is mad, is madness; but madness is not the predicate of law. There is no madness without the law; madness cannot be conceived before its

relation to the law” (81). The connection between the act of categorizing/constructing boundaries and the impossible reasoning behind doing so motivates this realization of “the madness of genre” (81). Ordering accompanies madness because the creation of order builds a logic of separation out of arbitrary signifiers; the law thus created does not bring madness with it, it is already mad from the beginning. And if genre—for Derrida a stand-in for reason and logic itself—is madness itself, then the boundaries around genres become both more flexible and rigid at once, while the producers of logic and reason operate under a kind of madness that is self-confirming and fundamentally problematic. Though asserting that Meyer prefigured Derrida would be absurd, the overlap between the fundamental instability of the empirical mind that works to order reality in Meyer’s Holmes and the perception of the limiting, categorizing work of genre as necessarily senseless is striking. Certainly Derrida would recognize that artists explore these topics creatively, and thus while the two do not share a bibliography they clearly share an awareness of a shift in the way the world works.

Derrida figures madness at the heart of genre, and Meyer writes madness into the character of Holmes; neither genre literature nor Holmes—as part of genre or empiricist tradition—can be accepted completely, nor can they ever escape our mistrust, our sense that although they may provide solutions or organizational strategies these offerings cannot be taken without scrutiny. It is no longer possible to innocently read without considering the form of the text and the nature of its subject. Furthermore, while we suspect Holmes’ sanity and the rationality behind his deductions, the text suggests that the reader should trust Watson no more than Holmes. The good doctor reveals to his reader that he has kept a secret from them for years, and then, in the end, Holmes and

Watson collude to fabricate the original story of “The Final Problem.” Watson does not wish to tell the true story and asks Holmes what he should publish. “‘Anything you like,’ was the bland reply. ‘Tell them I was murdered by my mathematics tutor, if you like. They’ll never believe you in any case’” (Meyer 221). This conversation shifts our attention away from the nature of Holmes’s adventures and deductions, moving the reader toward interest in the Holmes/Watson relationship and the lengths to which Watson will go to preserve belief in Holmes’ powers—up until this revelation. Holmes is very nearly infallible throughout the canon, and his mistakes are generally quite clearly resolved in positive ways, but Meyer’s text refuses him—and by extension his techniques—that flawlessness. Holmes is made human, flawed.

Defenders of the canon might argue that Holmes was *always* human, and that this was part of what made him interesting and different from similar creations. In the first chapter it was argued, relying on a number of scholars, that Holmes’ popularity depended in part upon his more human aspects. This perception is both intelligible and valid, though it does not provide a complete picture. While Holmes was more human than characters like Dupin, it was his eccentricity and reaction to the mysteries that made him human, not his fallibility; he was at least as accurate as Dupin in most circumstances, and certainly as cold, especially in his earlier incarnations. Instead of claiming that Holmes underwent a radical shift in moving from the canon to Meyer’s text (among others), borrowing the concept of a “shift in dominant” from Brian McHale’s discussion of postmodernism in *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987) provides a wonderful model from which to understand the postmodern situation of Holmes. McHale asserts that “the function of the dominant” is not to suggest that one text does not include the same themes and

concerns as another, but instead that “it specifies *the order* in which different aspects are to be attended to” (McHale 11). Two components can exist together in the same text in different periods, and that it is their relative importance—not whether or not they exist—that is the true arbiter of change across cultural production. Thus, while Holmes brings a far more human face to ratiocination than prior detectives did in Conan Doyle’s texts, the central focus of the canonical stories tended toward the ratiocination itself and not the humanity of the characters.

Coming some years after both Meyer and Derrida posited their observations, McHale’s construction clarifies the situation of Holmes in a postmodern literary/cultural space in at least two ways: first, it provides a way to understand the change from Conan Doyle to Meyer that does not dismiss the components of either; second, it reframes the nature of that change to the postmodern in a way that echoes Meyer’s parallel to Derrida. In the first sense, readers can accept that Conan Doyle’s Holmes was more human than other detectives while acknowledging that depicting Holmes in this way did not motivate the stories. The canonical texts are adventures in deduction, demonstrations of the generic work that Moretti clearly outlines; while authors such as Cawelti and Clausen find evidence for a more human Holmes, their readings rely upon minor details to make the case. The case is convincing in comparison with other detectives of the time,<sup>8</sup> but McHale suggests that the shift from modernism to postmodernism—echoed in the Meyer-led shift in Holmes—is not one of existence but of degree. He claims that certain

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<sup>8</sup> See the above-mentioned Nick Rennison book *The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes* or Hugh Greene’s older *The American Rivals of Sherlock Holmes* (1978) for some examples of this phenomenon, both of which recognize the ratiocinative center of turn-of-the-century detective fiction; the majority of these characters, such as Jacques Futrelle’s Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, are variations on the ratiocinative deductive model in their fight against crime. Rennison’s discussion of these characters as needing “unique selling points” also noted above implicitly recognizes that the content of these mysteries and their solutions were not substantially different, making variation in the detective’s identity the primary mode of differentiation.

texts are more difficult to place and can be used to support multiple positions depending on the historical situation of the critic (McHale 10-11) in his discussion of finding Faulkner on either side of the modernism/postmodernism divide, and in doing so provides a blueprint for perceiving change as a shift in the dominant under discussion, an alteration in degree and not kind. The same can be seen in Meyer's novel, where although there is a stronger focus on the nature of Holmes as a person and his relationship with Watson, a rousing adventure and a number of clever deductions certainly accompany that investigation. Meyer does not completely recreate the Holmes story form, he reorganizes its components.

Such reformation allows Meyer to cast doubt on the possibility of a completely objective, rational actor in much the same way as Derrida's explosion of genre as a rational categorization, and both of their constructions fit McHale's broader model of postmodernism. Though McHale frames his model in terms of a tentative set of possibilities and not a concrete definition, his articulation of reassessed dominants relies upon a distinction between the epistemological and ontological components of texts:

Intractable epistemological uncertainty becomes at a certain point ontological plurality or instability: push epistemological questions far enough and they "tip over" into ontological questions. By the same token, push ontological questions far enough and they tip over into epistemological questions—the sequence is not linear and unidirectional, but bidirectional and reversible. (11)

As before, the realization that modernist texts handled *both* epistemological and ontological concerns is central, with McHale supplementing this statement with the claim that modernist texts tend toward a privileging of the epistemological and postmodernist texts tend toward a privileging of the ontological. Derrida's concerns regarding the hardened limits of genre and construction of the generic code as a kind of madness

pushes away from epistemological questions by reorienting the reader to the constructedness of the concept; instead of exploring what the concept can help understand or how it works, the very idea of genre is put under examination—it is an ontological query.

Meyer's reorganization of the Holmes narrative mirrors McHale equally well, as the shift from texts that orient the reader around the question of the mystery itself and the clever deductions made by Holmes to *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* and its orientation toward the character and history of Holmes fits a change from an epistemological concern with what can be known and how we can know it to an ontological concern underpinning this knowledge: who is Holmes and how does his identity/subjectivity change the knowledge he produces? In a genre so tied to the resolution of mystery, Meyer's change must necessarily be somewhat minor in comparison with the other texts that McHale investigates; *The Seven-Per-Cent* solution does not reach quite as far as Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), but neither is it a complete rehash of classic Conan Doyle material. The dominant changes, and the questions of what kinds of knowledge are being produced and who produces this information force a turn inward toward the character of Holmes, prying at the gaps in his omniscience. The openings that Meyer and other writers find provide options for exploring both the character and the form in new and interesting ways outside of the traditional models.

Here McHale and Derrida are in dialogue with Nicholas Meyer, but this does not suggest that Meyer is working within the same fields of inquiry. Meyer's text is a fascinating novel with touchstones that resonate across the genre of Holmes stories, and as such understanding its treatment of the famous detective provides insight into the continuance of unique approaches to the character and the genre. *The Seven-Per-Cent*



*Solution* is a bellwether text, a novel that may not have directly influenced later narratives but that prefigures their treatments of Holmes; Derrida and McHale help to situate this change in terms of broader cultural movement. Meyer—and most other authors of this particular kind of Holmes pastiche—does not embrace the ontological dominant quite as strongly as the creators of other more “classic” postmodern texts (such as the aforementioned Pynchon), and it would be strange to suggest otherwise. He is working within the Holmes narrative and not trying to completely subvert it, and thus faces limits that the theorists need not encounter. But in a genre where the epistemological has been celebrated above all else since its inception—the ratiocinative detective story—any question of that appreciation constitutes a radical alteration of perspective.

Important as the cultural shift toward a postmodern embrace of ontological concerns may be to authors of the Holmes texts under discussion in this project, the rights holders’ ability to control their character remains a necessary component of expansion within the Holmes genre. The willingness of both Princess Nina and Dame Jean to allow pastiche that challenges readers’ expectations provided authors the opportunity to explore Holmes from a direction that did not simply recreate the old models. This is not to say that there were no rules, as Jon Lellenberg, Jean’s representative in the United States, described Jean’s limits on what could be done with Holmes as follows:

- 1) No negative portrayals of the royal family, including scandals or other situations.
- 2) No negative portrayals of the British military, as Dame Jean spent a great deal of her life in the Royal Air Force.
- 3) No positive portrayals of drug use, though drugs could certainly be part of Holmes narratives. (Lellenberg Interview)

Within those confines, most other things were allowed.<sup>9</sup> Setting up rules such as this, even if they did not cover all of the possible reasons a text might be rejected by the estate, allows authors to approach the Holmes story from culturally current perspectives. Had Adrian or Denis remained in control, their interest in ensuring a primarily adaptation-centered production of their father's stories would not have created such an opportunity for writers—put directly, Meyer's novel never would have been published.

The intersection between rights holder's permissive attitudes and a change in dominant during the shift to postmodernism provides a fascinating example of the conditions required to maintain cultural interest in a character. These two factors provide the foundation for the expansion and proliferation of Sherlock Holmes-related products in the late twentieth century and beginning of the twenty-first, from relatively slavish pastiche like *The House of Silk* (which itself still ventures outside of Conan Doyle's comfort zone) to far more interesting explorations that will be discussed in upcoming chapters. However, the convergence of the two circumstances should not be immediately treated as a coincidence, and future narratives with the character are likely to face an entirely new set of difficulties as the estate transitions from a model reliant upon copyright law to one that uses a trademark of the Sherlock Holmes character to regulate Holmes narratives. Examining the convenient mesh between McHale's ontological dominant and the relaxed attitude toward Holmes stories must conclude this chapter, as the situation prompts questions of shared assumptions and provides a model with which various new texts may be approached. If the dominant is now ontological, the question of Holmes's value becomes paramount.

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that other rules may have been implicit, such as avoidance of homosexual relationships between Holmes and Watson, and it seems likely that other limits regarding the "spirit" of a Holmes story—what is described above as the "acceptability" of a pastiche—have always been in place.

### **Interrogating and Trademarking Detection**

The conditions, both cultural and legal, for the existence of the texts examined in later chapters have been established, and a brief note about what those conditions imply and may provide for in the future will close this chapter. The postmodern turn brings with it a focus on the assumptions underpinning the work done by Holmes, an opportunity to confront Holmes with some of the problematic assumptions and beliefs with which he has been associated. Much of the remainder of this project will work through the consequences of this situation, but the relationship between character and culture is quite complex and cannot be limited to simple critique. Holmes's empirical mind remains as keen as ever, and epistemology is not absent from these interrogations of the character, making the exploration of ontological questions inseparable from the epistemological, as McHale recognizes. Simultaneously, as the success of the character and the continuation of his popularity can be traced in part to the ways copyright has been used to protect and nourish Holmes as a source of income, continued attention to the ownership situation will outline the limits of what is likely to be done with the detective in the future. The copyright situation is currently quite complicated but could soon become exceedingly simple if no further copyright extension laws are passed. If so, the major issue will be the differences in use, control, and other conditions between copyright and trademark along with the process of acquiring and defending the latter. A brief overview of this situation will create a space in which to speculate on the future of Sherlock Holmes as a quite valuable commodity aside from any particular texts featuring him.

Before discussing the future of Holmes and his entrance into the public domain, the question of what an ontologically focused Holmes narrative might look like deserves consideration. In this framework, Holmes remains a producer of knowledge but his production must be situated and historicized—he must be re-embodied in a radical fashion, stripping him of his assumed objectivity and revealing the inherent prejudices underlying his actions. Almost all contemporary pastiches of Holmes play this game to some extent, as the cultural values that Holmes supported have been challenged if not replaced. Holmes’s efforts to resolve crimes featuring women now occur with a twentieth century, feminist perspective informing their position instead of simple dismissal, as in the case of CBS’s television show *Elementary* (2012-present) which features a female Watson. In many cases the detective is put together with female characters that challenge his assumptions, including two texts discussed in chapter three, Nancy Springer’s *The Case of the Missing Marquess* (2006), and Laurie King’s *The Beekeeper’s Apprentice* (1994). In these and other texts, Holmes’s assumptions regarding rationality and gender undergo significant scrutiny and, most regularly, dismissal.

The implications of his work as an Englishman during the height of one of the largest empires in history can no longer be put aside, and his efforts to support the British crown are more often put into the context of imperial action and colonial control. This appears in academic work like Caroline Reitz’s *Detecting the Nation: Fictions of Detection and the Imperial Venture* (2004) and Jon Thompson’s *Fiction, Crime, and Empire* as well as in fiction like the panoply of texts featuring the detective in Asia—particularly Tibet and British-controlled South Asia—from Ted Riccardi’s *The Oriental Casebook of Sherlock Holmes* (2003) to Partha Basu’s *The Curious Case of 221B: The*

*Secret Notebooks of John H. Watson M.D.* (2009) and Jamyang Norbu's *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* (2003). Though Holmes is never described as traveling to the colonies in the canon,<sup>10</sup> the colonies specifically and the wider world outside of England more generally often provide the impetus for his adventures; his brother Mycroft is even more highly implicated in government activities. Such investigations and narratives assert the situatedness of Holmes's knowledge and question the universality of his knowledge, confronting readers with the links between his beliefs and the system of authority in which he participated.

Rounding off the identity exploration, though little is known of Holmes's background, the nature of his skills, his knowledge, and his status as the descendent of "country squires" ("The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter," 1893) implies a class quite removed from that of many clients and criminals with whom he interacts, and this social distinction leaves aside the entire question of the Baker Street Irregulars. These street urchins who help Holmes on several cases are essentially poor, homeless children, though this fact goes almost completely without remark within the canon, while Anthony Horowitz's *The House of Silk* puts the implications of the class divide between Holmes and his child servants into the foreground. Finally, though race is not a major factor in most of the Holmes stories, a page might be taken from Holmes's own book, such that the curious thing about race in his stories is its near absence.

All of this may seem quite critical of the detective and his projects, but the texts that bring these perspectives to the forefront with Holmes are constrained by the very genre in which they appear. While Holmes does face a significant amount of criticism,

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<sup>10</sup> Save perhaps the explanation he provides to Watson upon his return in "The Adventure of the Empty House."

both implied and explicit, his intelligence and most authors' desire to write him *as* intelligent create striking interplay. Holmes's investigatory nature implies a willingness to accept difficult truths ("Eliminate the impossible...") or at the very least challenges to his worldview, and he is rarely shown to hold views that are not supported with evidence and reason—though this is not always the case. Postmodern Holmes narratives are therefore incredibly complex, attempting to balance critique of the detective's outmoded investigative approach with new kinds of logic and social narratives. The resulting space that has opened for Holmes narratives does not guarantee the validity of any singular perception of Holmes, his methods, or his beliefs (implied or otherwise). The complexity of the situation may have actually guaranteed the opposite, and new texts featuring Holmes's canonical perception of women appear alongside narratives featuring a newly enlightened detective. Despite this multiplicity of perspectives and directions from which it is now possible to approach the detective, some of the most interesting material being produced attempts to find a way to balance new perceptions and ideas with a respect for the character and the canon, revealing a great deal about authors' (and their readers') ambivalence regarding difficult cultural transitions occurring throughout the twentieth century. Some of these texts will be the focus of the later chapters in this book, though there are far too many to engage with all of them usefully; explorations of the texts presented here will prove indicative of the remainder.

The proliferation of postmodern Holmes narratives may have come some time after the initial turn away from a sort of epistemological modernism, but it fits into what Fredric Jameson considers "the *relief* of the postmodern generally, a thunderous unblocking of logjams and a release of new productivity that was somehow tensed up and

frozen, locked like cramped muscles, at the end of the modern period” (313, emphasis his). The delay may stem from the primacy of Holmes’s engagement with epistemology, but in any case questions of the detective’s (privileged) status as a producer of meaning and knowledge are now under careful consideration. The “thunderous unblocking of logjams” and the “release of new activity” occur through engagement with the complexities of the philosophical negotiation Holmes represents, demonstrating McHale’s claim that both being and knowing participate together in texts of the postmodern period.

On a track parallel to McHale, Jameson recognizes the transition he discusses but situates it within a Marxist perspective, finding that though the work of the postmodern artists and critics may open pathways for analysis and critique, their localized, individual nature makes them difficult platforms for political action (Jameson 408-414). With such a broad variety of possible Holmes narratives, few of which cohere into any one particular worldview, the role of the detective as a cultural definer or clarifier becomes lost. Moretti’s structuralist view of detective fiction no longer operates as it once did, and Holmes cannot be a single arbiter of meaning any longer—even if wrong. The multiplicity of Holmes narratives and their fragmentary approach to the world echoes the fragmentation of postmodernism generally, insofar as these texts may have individual issues and concerns, but they do not cohere into a larger political movement. Discussing this very issue, Jameson highlights a larger and far more unified “actor” that overrides much of the fragmentary politics of postmodernism; “This is, of course, multinational capital itself,” which he describes as a “higher (or more abstract and global) kind of agency than any so far enumerated” (Jameson 408). The consequences of this situation

include a generalized sense of absent agency in postmodern activity and a resultant transfer of power to capitalist action, such that finding sufficiently large groups capable of checking “multinational capital” becomes significantly harder. Though Jameson’s theory operates primarily on the hypothetical and structural level, practical impacts are visible—with Holmes’s situation a case in point.

The impression of postmodernism on cultural products such as Holmes narratives relies in part upon the goodwill of the rights holders, and their generosity is tied to the demands of the market. The fragile productivity of this relationship in terms of both texts created and money made is subject to the legal system in which the rights exist, and changes to the legal situation reveal the delicacy of the combination. Copyright law provides finite privileges to rights holders, and the end of these protections for Sherlock Holmes is within sight; however, other, quite different protections for intellectual property can be pursued under trademark law, which offers temporally indefinite safeguards of a different nature. Though authors and other creators may retain the current freedom to do with Holmes as they wish in the future, the move from copyright to trademark does not occur without consequences; trademark law operates in a completely different manner, and those differences may make such free use of the great detective more difficult or even impossible, primarily due to the wide exposure Holmes has received and the potential narrowing that trademark law can imply. The next significant change in the ownership and management of the detective could result in a collapse of the conditions that have made narratives featuring him so interesting, leading to stagnation and a reduced role in the public imagination.



The current status of the copyright on Sherlock Holmes remains complex, having left Dame Jean's hands upon her death in 1998 and, through her will, passing to the British Institute for the Blind (Lellenberg Interview). The Institute eventually sold the copyright to a group of Conan Doyle's heirs and is currently held by Conan Doyle Estate Ltd., which manages the character for the Conan Doyle family; Mr. Jon Lellenberg, who agreed to be interviewed for this project, is the estate's representative in the United States. However, their ownership of this copyright is somewhat limited, as the British copyright on Conan Doyle's canonical stories expired in 1980, and in the United States the only text remaining within copyright is the final collection, *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes*, which was published in 1927. As current law stands, there is some question as to the utility of a copyright that covers only part of a character's printed texts; the Conan Doyle Estate maintains that its ownership of the copyright on Holmes's final stories grants it the authority to interdict publication of any other Holmes stories, even if they do not use *The Case-Book* in their pastiche (Lellenberg Interview). There have not been any substantial legal decisions in this area that have fully clarified the issue, and it should be noted that the producers of the recent BBC *Sherlock* series sought the Conan Doyle Estate's licensing rights to air their show in the United States, the recent Guy Ritchie films featuring Holmes were both licensed by the Conan Doyle Estate, as was the new CBS series *Elementary* (Conan Doyle Estate Ltd).

Soon the copyright will expire, and all of the Conan Doyle canon will be in the public domain throughout the majority of the world, but the estate is not passively waiting for this to happen. Mr. Lellenberg described the Conan Doyle Estate's plan as a transition away from copyright toward trademark, which shifts the ownership role in

fascinating ways. Copyright protects individual texts and creations from being used in ways that their owners would not approve, including the republication of texts already produced or creating new stories that are not covered under fair use doctrines (such as parody). Trademark works differently, providing protection for identifiers of a product's source and, ideally, ensuring that a specific product meets a level of quality associated with the source. Trademarks exist to prevent other producers from diluting the power of a particular brand, and have been used to preserve a character's image from weakening due to lower quality products appearing without authorization. A change from copyright to trademark therefore indicates that the character of Holmes would no longer be simply a creation owned and managed by the estate and would instead become an identifier for the estate itself, a mark for a specific quality of product associated with the estate's work and their presentation of the character. A shift in terminology is not the only concern, as the requirements for determining trademark are more stringent than those of copyright and could potentially limit Holmes's definition and thus the character's usefulness.

According to Caroline Goussé, in an essay on a trademark dispute relating to John Carter and Tarzan, trademarks "can persist as long as the mark is identified as a source for specific goods or services," but "a party must show that its mark is distinctive, protectable, and that the litigious work indeed infringes upon the mark" (Gousse). To convert Holmes into a trademark, the character must be shown to be associated primarily with the Conan Doyle Estate and must be clearly identifiable as such. While it may seem reasonable to associate the character of Sherlock Holmes with the estate given their extended use and licensing of the character, the question of what qualities would be used to define him as "distinctive" is in fact quite difficult. If, as much of the preceding

chapter has argued, Holmes has become more genre than character, the defining characteristics may be too broadly spread to allow for sufficient distinction. More troublesome, should a limited definition of Holmes be created for the purposes of trademark, that limited definition may strip Holmes's set of signifiers back, establishing a certain set of required features that must be present to allow for the character to count as Holmes under trademark law. Should a text use only a subset of those features or use them in a combination with others that are *not* associated with the trademark, the estate may have grounds to bring legal action against such material.

A trademark of Holmes as a "source for specific goods" is also more complicated than it might initially appear. While the trademark could represent the role played by the copyright holders over the last century, the breadth of decisions made and the variety of interpretations and pastiches may pose problems, as the ownership of the character has changed hands regularly and no one person or entity can claim responsibility for the entire set of products. If the estate wishes to construct a trademark based upon recent action instead, then the question of distinctiveness appears again and it may be difficult to establish a specific version of Holmes (or perhaps a specific set of signifiers that "mean" Holmes) that they would wish to trademark, especially given the breadth of recent creations. This is compounded by the court's desire to have the "source" be somewhat unified, as Kathryn M. Foley describes: "single source requirement is particularly relevant where a character appears in a variety of different media" (943). These questions do not yet have answers, but in answering them a distinct possibility must be considered wherein trademark law could significantly reduce the ways Holmes is presented and maintained as a commercial entity.

The final major condition for creating a trademark using a character is, as Foley explains, that the figure must be distinctive through having “undergone a reasonable degree of circulation and established some level of public recognition” (941), and Holmes may be over-qualified for this prerequisite. That very over-qualification leads to the same difficulties discussed above, as the multitude of Holmes variations makes him both a recognizable figure in the cultural imagination and a somewhat vague set of signifiers—a genre. The overarching concern with the application of trademark law to Sherlock Holmes is the degree to which this transition will limit his usefulness by restricting his signifiers and limiting differentiation across texts. A Holmes restricted to Victorian settings, curved pipes and tweed clothing may still be valuable, but the range of possible uses for such a character is obviously more limited, as the discussion of genre expansion through Neale above suggests. Restriction, limitation, prevention—these terms seem at odds with the openness and versatility displayed by the Sherlock Holmes rights holders since the seventies, but they may have little choice should they wish to continue using the character to make money. There are significant, unanswered questions regarding the nature of the trademark the estate is seeking; however, the actions of other companies in similar situations provide possible answers.

Trademark does not generally protect visual representation of fictional characters, but Foley provides examples of DC Comics characters Superman and Wonder Woman as counter examples (946); it is not clear whether a trademarked version of Holmes requires a similar visual uniqueness to be considered protected, nor whether the estate would want such a thing. Further complicating matters, as trademark is often meant to protect a character from other material that would attempt to deceive consumers as to the source of

the material, the nature of a trademark on Holmes that would make him sufficiently distinctive from other material, allowing for continued monetization of the character, seems difficult to create without significantly limiting what the character can be used for. A central component of trademark protection is defense against dilution, where a character cannot be used in a way that would reduce the value of the trademark. Primarily used to protect “famous” trademarks, this applies even without competing goods and can be used to prevent the trademark’s use “on non-competing goods” (951). Should Holmes be given a “famous” designation by the courts, the estate may be required to bring suits against any creators using Holmes without their permission to ensure that they are sufficiently defending their trademark against dilution. The ability to prevent almost any kind of text from including the character without express permission of the estate can result in a powerful chilling effect, and may significantly impact the prior use of the incorporative cease and desist strategy.

Of the entities that defend their trademarks aggressively, perhaps the most notorious is The Walt Disney Company, which has pursued trademark infringement cases against even some of the smallest offenders. In 1989, Disney infamously forced a Florida daycare center to paint over murals on its walls that featured some of Disney’s famous cartoon characters (Schmalz), as the center had not obtained permission from the company to use its trademarked figures. In that same year, Disney sued the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences because of an “unauthorized use of its Snow White character in what it called an unflattering opening number” of the Oscars (“Disney Company Sues over Snow White Use”). In both cases, the company sought to ensure that it had full control over depictions of its trademarked goods, lest the public begin to

believe that certain depictions were authorized or acceptable—and thus a reduction in quality or value for Disney. The actions taken by The Walt Disney Company can be read as an aggressive policy toward ensuring that their trademarks remain effective vectors of merchandising and sales, but they should be equally considered a consequence of laws that allow for and require such defense. An attempt to avoid similar pursuit of trademark violators may result in a loss or reduction of trademark efficacy and thus reduced capacity for monetization, making the Disney strategy a model that other companies emulate, perhaps including the Conan Doyle Estate.

Disney is hardly the only company acting so uncompromisingly, and in 2000 the Starbucks Corporation sued Kieron Dwyer for his parodic alteration of their famous logo, in which he replaced the words “Starbucks Coffee” with “Consumer Whore” and accordingly altered the image to critique cultural attitudes toward consumption. Starbucks sued Dwyer on both copyright and trademark infringement grounds, and while the work was successfully defended against copyright charges on the basis of fair use parody, the court ruled against Dwyer in terms of trademark violation (“CBLDF Case Files – Starbucks v. Dwyer”). The court’s ruling clearly indicates that parody (and potentially other fair use defenses) is not a sufficient defense for the alteration of a trademark, a sobering thought for any creators seeking to explore parodic or other fair use possibilities with a trademarked character. Because trademark connects so directly to perceptions of a company’s product, tarnishing that perception is sufficient cause to override other concerns in the opinion of some courts. Piling frustrations further, Dwyer was prevented from fully exploring his legal options due to a separate chilling effect created by the high costs of participating in the legal system. Though this combination of

factors may compel artists seeking to use Sherlock Holmes to consult with the Conan Doyle Estate before beginning projects, it also reduces conversation featuring the detective. Parody is a fascinating and useful way to engage with a character's value and assumptions, and that leaves aside the question of other fair use options. Should the use of part of a character qualify as a fair use exception under copyright, that ruling may not hold under trademark law, making variation on the trademarked characteristics of Holmes an impossibility. As above, perhaps the most fundamental issue for the estate is the balance between defining the character as a trademark in a way that is functional as a trademark while also broad enough to allow for the stories discussed in this book to remain a possibility; the two goals may prove mutually exclusive.

Recently a court case clarified some aspects of the Conan Doyle Estate's position regarding their character's singular identity under copyright and thus likely under trademark. In February of 2013 Holmes scholar and lawyer Leslie Klinger brought a case against Conan Doyle Estate Ltd. to the District Court of Illinois, asserting that the character should be in the public domain as the majority of the stories featuring the detective are public domain in the United States. Only *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes* remains under copyright, and Klinger claims in his suit that since no substantive character traits—what he terms “Sherlock Holmes Story Elements” (Gilbert 4)—are introduced in *The Case-Book*, the character should be part of the public domain. In response, the Conan Doyle Estate asserts that Klinger's

position would create multiple personalities out of Sherlock Holmes: a ‘public domain’ version of his character attempting to only use only public domain traits, next to the true character Sir Arthur created. But there are not sixty versions of Sherlock Holmes in the sixty stories; there is one complex Sherlock Holmes. To attempt to dismantle Holmes's character is not only impossible as a practical

matter, but would ignore the reality that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle created a single complex character complete in sixty stories. (“Conan Doyle’s Response” 7-8)

The position articulated here, in its unitary vision of Conan Doyle’s detective, asserts that a piecemeal version of the detective is not truly the detective at all. Such a shadow would necessarily fail to represent the character created by Conan Doyle, as the complexity created by the “sixty stories” is fundamental to the detective’s identity. The Estate’s position here serves as both a defense against Klinger’s claims and useful groundwork for the requirements of trademark. The demand for a clear, singular definition of a character in pursuit of trademark status links the defense here to a future claim for trademark status. If this reading is correct, then fear for continued narratives featuring versions of Holmes that alter the basic framework established by Conan Doyle in the canonical stories may be well founded. If, as the Estate asserts, there is only one version of the character, then the productive changes implemented by the authors discussed in subsequent chapters may become impossible, potentially forcing Sherlock Holmes into a kind of stagnation.

On December 23<sup>rd</sup> of 2013, the court released a ruling that clarified the public domain status of the character so long as elements from the final stories are not included. Basing his decision on, among other things, the legal battle over *Amos & Andy* copyrights in the transition from radio to other media, Judge Rubén Castillo determined that “Where the author has used the character in a series of works, some of which are in the public domain, the public is free to copy story elements from the public domain works” (Castillo 12). This implies that the character itself is separate from the works that determine it, and that anyone can use the version of the character that includes only public domain components. Partially ruling in Klinger’s favor, Castillo also reaffirmed the copyrighted status of the “Post-1923 Story Elements” in his decision, which gives the Estate



significant hope that their control over the character will be maintained. This might imply that the character is largely available for use, however, the Estate notes that in his recent collection, a third of the stories published by Klinger used protected elements of the characters and thus the publisher “entered into a modest licensing arrangement with the Estate despite Mr. Klinger’s position against such a license” (“Ruling Protects Much”), demonstrating that it is not so easy to separate the character from the entire breadth of stories that compose it. Further maintaining their central claim, the Estate’s lawyers believe that the characters themselves remain copyrighted and that

[t]he ruling did not provide a direct answer to this argument [of copyright on characters] and appeared not to acknowledge the basic copyright rule that highly delineated characters are entitled to their own copyright. The Estate hopes to appeal the decision so that Sherlock Holmes and many other significant characters created over a series of novels or stories receive protection for the full copyright term intended by Congress. (“Ruling Protects Much”)

Thus the Estate continues to proclaim that the characters themselves are copyrightable and thus copyrighted, an issue that was not solved to their satisfaction in this court case. Whether they decide to appeal or simply push for trademark status on the character remains to be seen, but it seems unlikely that the Estate will relinquish control over their characters easily.

In the past, the Sherlock Holmes rights holders have used their powers to effectively maintain the popularity of the character, and though some of their decisions have benefited significantly from serendipitous situations, they have nonetheless successfully maintained the character’s popularity and perhaps even increased it. Recent history also shows that the rights holders’ willingness to allow significant departures from the canon since the 1970s has converged with the postmodern turn in literature, resulting in an impressive new era of stories featuring Conan Doyle’s most famous

creation that engage with issues discussed throughout the broader culture and largely irrelevant to Conan Doyle or his creation. It would be a shame if the transition from copyright to trademark made continued production of such texts more difficult or stalled them outright, and the evidence provided by other companies' protection of their trademarks—alongside the Estate's defense of their current copyright—suggests that such concerns are valid. Despite these concerns, the evidence above also demonstrates that there are too many variables to make an accurate prediction, and it is possible that the Conan Doyle Estate will find a middle ground in which to pursue continued monetization of the character while allowing significant variation in that use.

The impact of the capital-protecting laws under which the estate manages Holmes remain a major factor, and despite the incredible interest in Holmes and the variety and utility of texts currently produced featuring the character, the relationship between the two currently leans toward the legal rights of the owners. Jameson's recognition that multinational capital possesses the focus and singularity absent from the texts that investigate cultural assumptions remains true, and the legal system is more favorable to businesses than artists. That said, at the current moment Sherlock Holmes appears in fascinating texts in nearly all media, participating in discussions of difficult issues and ongoing concerns of twenty-first century culture; while their possible disappearance cannot be ignored, these texts remain valuable as an example of the fascinating paradox at work in the extended persistence of characters across time. The questions and concerns of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century are far removed from those of Victorian London, yet authors have managed to find entertaining ways of invoking the detective to explore these issues. In doing so, these authors balance the traditional

detective role with postmodern skepticism regarding its efficacy, and in many cases they find a balance between the two that allows for an integrative aesthetic in place of an exclusionary one. There are a number of different places toward which to move after this chapter, but the work it has done to establish the postmodern situation of Holmes narratives seems a suitable place from which to engage with a central concern of equality, respect, and situated knowledge. Thus the following chapter will look at a feminist critique of the Victorian project of knowledge Holmes represents, an analysis that jumps at the chance to expose Holmes's prejudices while relying on these same logical faculties to encourage an inclusive growth in place of a dismissive excision.

## CHAPTER III

### THE ADVENTURE OF THE FEMINIST INVESTIGATOR

The problematic relationship between Sherlock Holmes and women has prompted a wide variety of stories and texts reacting to the detective's belief in the limited capacity of women, the singular woman who evaded his detective abilities, and his consistent bachelorhood. Noted in chapter one, William Gillette's stage play changed this canonical attitude toward women by providing a romantic partner for Holmes, and though his play provided many features that have persisted, the romance has not. The CBS television show *Elementary* (2012-present) presents viewers with a female Watson but only refers to a relationship between the characters in joking terms, playing with audience expectation briefly and then leaving the possibility aside.<sup>1</sup> The BBC *Sherlock* series (2010-present) rewrites "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891) for its audience, giving Irene Adler, the woman who outsmarted Holmes in the canon, a dominatrix makeover and charging the game she plays against the detective with aggressive sexuality. Improving the role of a different woman from the canon, Barry Brown's *The Unpleasantness at Parkerton Manor* (2010) begins a series of books in which the true master detective at 221B Baker Street is none other than Mrs. Hudson, who uses Holmes as a front for her work. And perhaps most surprising for its target age, *The Case of the Missing Marquess* (2007) introduces the previously unknown Enola Holmes, the little sister of Sherlock and Mycroft, presents her experience of the world as a counterpoint to that of her older

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<sup>1</sup> The relationship between Irene Adler and Moriarty in the show offers interesting material for comment and would make an excellent addition to this chapter in a longer form.

brothers, and establishes the value of a female detective—all of which is designed for and marketed to pre-teen readers.

*The Case of the Missing Marquess*, written by Nancy Springer and the first of a series featuring Enola, intrigues in no small part because of its claim for a kind of knowledge inaccessible to Sherlock and Mycroft. In presenting the existence of a uniquely female experience of the world, Springer's book relies upon the idea that knowledge is inseparable from the situation in which it is produced, and its presentation of this concept to younger readers is evidence of the near ubiquity of the belief for twenty-first century thinkers. The use of a young woman to demonstrate the situatedness of comprehension is not an accident, as feminist scholars of science have been at the forefront of social science studies exploring the variety of ways science has been largely organized by and made for men, leading to unquestioned assumptions and erroneous conclusions, particularly about women. Springer's book extends the results of these critiques into both the realm of Holmes and thus the art and science of detection, but it does not engage the detective himself directly with these concerns. It critiques Holmes by dramatizing the limitations of his subject position—male, moneyed, white—and their imposition on his ability to understand certain actions and topics, but this critique does not expose Holmes to his own limits, seeking instead to highlight the value of Enola's own subjective experience.

Performing a similar critique but including the detective in the discussion, Laurie R. King's *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* (1994) places Holmes into conversation with a young woman who is his intellectual equal. In its depiction of their relationship, King's book provides a feminist criticism of Holmes while also recuperating him through that

criticism. While the text undercuts the detective's belief in his own infallibility and the masculine association with reason and logic, that very logic and reason allows Holmes back into the conversation, providing the space for agreement instead of derision. In this way, *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* is an ideal showcase for the postmodern dilemma of writing Holmes stories that appreciate the character while also recognizing his flaws. In its capacity as a feminist critique of Holmesian reason and logic, the novel brings the weight of the feminist critique of science to bear on the genre of Holmes stories. This chapter will establish the necessary bases for understanding the critique King offers along with its parallels to feminist epistemological criticism—most particularly the model of scientific realism described by Evelyn Fox Keller. In doing so, we will also recognize the value of women's presence as a confounding agent in the canon and explore Holmes's rhetorical value for scientific work, using both as a springboard to discuss the intervention King performs in her novel. *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* is an excellent first text for this project, as it navigates the complex demands of postmodern Holmes pastiche creatively and provides an opportunity to understand its navigations within a wider frame of cultural criticism.

This chapter contains four sections that will work together to present its argument, with the first two focusing on the canonical Holmes and the second two looking at later criticism in science studies and literature. Before a full awareness of King's efforts can occur, the association between Holmes and science needs demonstration, as does Conan Doyle's vision of the relationship between the detective and women. Each of these receives significant attention of its own in the first two sections, with the initial segment focusing on the cultural association between Sherlock Holmes and science. This

discussion clarifies the link between Holmes and scientific thinking both canonically and throughout the twentieth century, reading the connection as an intentional decision on the part of Conan Doyle that has persisted as a well-known characteristic of the detective. Equally familiar is Holmes's consistent bachelorhood, which is often associated with either a disinterest in romantic relationships or the character's self-affirmed disregard for women. In the second section of the chapter, the canonical presentation of Holmes's disinterest in women will be explored as both a necessary precondition for understanding King's text but also as a way of establishing the limits of the detective's knowledge. A multitude of examinations of Holmes's treatment of women identify gaps in the detective's system of understanding, caused in no small part by his disinterest in women and inability to account for them within his own system of understanding; these critical looks highlight a limit to the power of a masculinist scientific approach to the world.

With these two bases established, the third section builds on the criticism of Holmes's skill created by the presence of women in the canon, expanding their implicit questions for his "objective" approach with a full feminist critique of science. The tradition of masculine science underwent significant reassessment following the postmodern turn, with feminist critics taking up the threads of radical subjectivity and pulling them through the master narrative of scientific understanding, unraveling it almost entirely. The work done to save a kind of objectivity in science appears in the form of "scientific realism," which treats science as a way toward acceptable, useful answers instead of literal truth.<sup>2</sup> This postmodern vision of a more democratic, open

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<sup>2</sup> There are many approaches to this problem, which may not even be a problem for some students of science. For the purposes of this chapter, "scientific realism" is both a regularly referenced approach in feminist epistemology and a strong fit for King's work in her novel. However, there are many other

science demands as broad a variety of thinkers and practitioners as possible to best ensure the acceptability and utility of the data and ideas it produces. It also expands King's treatment of Holmes in her novel quite effectively, as the addition of a young, female thinker to the traditional narrative allows the author to dramatize the feminist concern with and rehabilitation of traditional science. The fourth section thus directly explores King's vision for the detective, which does not relegate him to the dustbin of the Victorian era and instead recognizes his utility and provides a progressive update for the sleuth—in place of a wholly radical shift. In this way she does with Holmes what feminist scholars did with science, and while problems exist with this more conservative approach to the character, her work is largely acceptable to the Holmes community and to those concerned with the character's limits.

As the first chapter focusing specifically on a text made possible by the situation of the Holmes genre both in terms of liberal ownership and postmodern cultural expectations, the material here will clarify the value of this period in the history of Sherlock Holmes. The canonical version of the character offers readers a polite bachelor misogynist with a great interest in science, forcing contemporary readers faced with that particular identity to historicize it as a product of its time—a situation that quickly locks Holmes into a position as a historical oddity. Intervening in the process, authors like Laurie R. King use the reason so effectively deployed by Holmes to confront him with the poor logic of his positions, updating the character from within. In this update, King's book and others that question Holmes's view of women help to maintain the character's

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approaches, and further exploration of work by Karl Popper, Donna Haraway, and Helen Longino would be valuable for readers interested in alternate options.



relevance and directly impact his persistence, exemplifying the care needed to successfully acknowledge a character's value while changing that very character.

### **The Scientific Holmes**

Though after the publication of Nicholas Meyer's *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* the primary form of Holmes pastiche shifted from the short story to the novel, a great many short pieces were still produced, and publishers continue to print collections of these pastiches. Most of these imitative authors provide an assortment of stories quite similar to Conan Doyle's canonical collections, but some, such as Colin Bruce, use the detective in other ways. In his book of stories titled *The Strange Case of Mrs. Hudson's Cat: And Other Science Mysteries Solved by Sherlock Holmes* (1997), Bruce brings the character of Holmes to an entirely new position, in which the detective introduces and explains concepts in science, particularly physics. In his introduction to the collection, Bruce acknowledges both cultural perception of and Holmes's own belief in his scientific mind, asserting that

in the world's imagination, Sherlock Holmes has reigned triumphant in his field for over a century. We know that he regarded himself as a scientist. Many of his famous aphorisms—knowledge follows first from observation and then from deduction; don't theorize ahead of the facts; accept the improbable once the impossible has been eliminated; an exception disproves the rule and must not be ignored—describe just those rules that good scientific investigation should follow, in plain language that should be the envy of some modern philosophers of science. (x)

With this vision of the detective in mind, Bruce wrote a series of short stories that rely upon Holmes's ability to reason through problems to elucidate scientific issues and concerns in place of the detective's more traditional crime-centered mysteries.

While some of the stories in *The Strange Case of Mrs. Hudson's Cat* focus on a crime, others elide the crime-solution framework by reasoning through scientific phenomena that are difficult to grasp; throughout the text, each narrative turns on a scientific concept for its resolution. Bruce tries to avoid complex mathematics or description to explore some “unresolved details,” such as the oddly consistent speed of light and the movement of subatomic particles, that “were to blow apart the comfortably exact picture of the Universe which nineteenth-century scientists had so patiently assembled” (ix), establishing that reason itself is the most useful tool for a scientist. Intriguingly, Bruce relies upon a Victorian character who he describes as a strict adherent of scientific reasoning to explore concepts that often challenge a traditional Victorian vision of a mechanical, ordered universe, implicitly suggesting that the scientific approach is both capable of superseding and limited by the cultural setting in which it is used. In these tales, Holmes, ever-reliant upon his aphorism that “when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth” (*New Annotated Novels* 274), confronts counter-intuitive situations and accepts the improbable paradoxes they often produce instead of demanding impossible simplicity. Conan Doyle's detective becomes a tool for Bruce as he expands both understanding of difficult scientific concepts and the careful, logical reasoning that is necessary to approach such ideas. In *The Strange Case of Mrs. Hudson's Cat*, Holmes uses his reasoning power to avoid the pitfalls of Victorian assumptions that hampered understanding of these concepts in the early twentieth century.

Bruce's text demonstrates his belief in the power of the scientific method, Holmes's connection to it, and the capacity of fictional representations to effectively

propagate understanding of, awareness of, and interest in science. These beliefs are not spun from whole cloth, as his citation of Holmes's notes on reasoning demonstrates, and Conan Doyle's original texts make clear the importance of associating the character with science. When first described to Watson in *A Study in Scarlet*, Stamford describes Holmes as "an enthusiast in some branches of science" (18), and the good doctor's first encounter with the detective occurs in a chemistry laboratory. There, Holmes exclaims that he has "found a re-agent which is precipitated by haemoglobin, and by nothing else" (20), indicating knowledge of chemistry, the trial and error of experimentation, and interest in the practical application of scientific discovery. These details establish the importance Conan Doyle placed on Holmes's association with science and logical reasoning, appearing within the first chapter of the first story. Though at times in the canon this characteristic of Holmes fluctuates in its importance, the power of this initial encounter resonates throughout the remainder of Holmes's existence. This section outlines the breadth of the connection between Conan Doyle's detective and scientific thinking and the persistence of that link across the twentieth century, establishing a foundation upon which the later critiques can rest. Beginning with the canonical material and moving into later analyses of Holmes's role, we conclude with an awareness of the socially constructed nature of Conan Doyle's scientific presentation, highlighting the possibility of bias in Holmes's view of the world.

Ensuring that his readers understood the source of Holmes's skills from their first encounter with him, Conan Doyle titled the second chapter of *A Study in Scarlet* "The

Science of Deduction,”<sup>3</sup> which contains a passage widely cited as proof of the detective’s scientific association. In an article Watson transcribes for us, Holmes writes:

From a drop of water...a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other. So all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known whenever we are shown a single link of it. Like all other arts, the Science of Deduction and Analysis is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study. (40)

The inferential possibilities of a single drop of water are perhaps less deductive and more inductive (or abductive, as will be discussed below), but Conan Doyle’s central message is clear: logic and reasoning can be used to envision the unseen or hypothesize the existence of things not present. Given partial information, the correct response for the author and his character is not to assume that there is nothing to learn but to use what data exists to better understand the situation and construct possibilities—or certainties. And, like any scientific practice, “Deduction and Analysis” does not come easily or without effort; Holmes establishes the importance of study here and later emphasizes practice exercises with which apprentices to his science might begin, linking the efforts here to “all other arts,” such as the chemistry he had recently been occupied with or even the medicine practiced by Watson.

Alongside the detective’s assertions, Watson’s medical degree should not be discounted as a valuable asset for the verification of Holmes’s scientific bona fides. As an observer of Holmes’s methods, Watson is an ideal narrator; having been through medical

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<sup>3</sup> Perhaps to cement the importance of this idea for readers still encountering Holmes for the first time, the first chapter of Conan Doyle’s second Holmes novel *The Sign of Four* (1890) is also titled “The Science of Deduction,” in which the detective critiques Watson’s narrative of *A Study in Scarlet* by arguing that “Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid” (217). Though Holmes complains, neither Watson nor Conan Doyle ever pretended to offer readers scientific treatises, and while Holmes has become a cultural icon of scientific thinking (if not always among scientists), the texts are meant as adventures that include logical thinking.

school, the good doctor represents a figure of scientific authority which makes his initial skepticism of the detective's skills both a useful narrative tool and a legitimate approach to the unknown. The presence of a medical doctor as a confirmer of Holmes's skill relies on popular awareness of the growing power of the physician and Conan Doyle's experience of logical analysis in medicine as seen in his instructor Doctor Joseph Bell. In the public sphere, medicine had been producing miraculous improvements to understanding of disease and the possibility of curing or mitigating various illnesses, from the use of general anesthetic and clean environments for surgery to the germ theory of disease and a striking number of new vaccines (the first for cholera, anthrax, and rabies were all discovered within three years from 1879 to 1882). Physicians were now able to intervene in the disease cycle and perform invasive surgery with far greater likelihood of patient survival, but they were also reliant upon their careful reasoning in doing so. Conan Doyle's instructor Bell, as described in the first chapter, demonstrated the importance of logical thinking not only as a method of surprising patients but also as a way to diagnose illness, something that Holmes's creator took to heart in his stories. Bell's skill and reputation were made in part through his ability to demonstrate these talents, providing him with great credibility as a physician. Critical portrayals of the doctor and medicine in literature certainly exist (with perhaps *Madame Bovary's* [1856] Charles Bovary one of the quintessential examples), and though Tabitha Sparks, in her *The Doctor in the Victorian Novel* (2009) argues that "we see doctors move from idealized heroes and family men...to hyper-rational scientists isolated from family life and fiction's romantic resolutions" (22) as the nineteenth century passes, greater

scientific focus and assuredness in efficacy of treatment motivates and sustains this change.

Holmes claims his work is scientific and Watson's medical degree helps confirm it for readers, but, more broadly, the very work done by detectives in the hunt for clues and construction of criminal narrative in the ratiocinative subgenre is largely empiricist in form. William Stowe, in his essay "From Semiotics to Hermeneutics: Modes of Detection in Conan Doyle and Chandler," argues that Conan Doyle's detective operates in a semiotic mode, moving "by and large, from visible facts—signs—to invisible facts, facts that are revealed but never altered by their submission to analysis" (373), and that this movement is strongly associated with early scientific thinking. He notes that detectives make assumptions about the nature of the world that

are based on a radical distinction between subject and object and a belief that thought and language are best understood as neutral, transparent instruments that man uses to gain power over the world...[and that these beliefs]...are the basis not only of traditional detective novels, but of a wide range of thinking about man's relation to the world, from ordinary and to some extent necessary common-sense assumptions about the instrumentality of language and thought. (Stowe 373)

Stowe continues his argument by claiming that the fundamental model of investigation pursued by Holmes, one that begins with clues that provide data in an uncomplicated way and moves from these "simple" clues to beliefs about prior action and causation, was untenable for audiences and was largely replaced by the more complex models of reality present in Raymond Chandler's detective fiction. More importantly for this project, the "common-sense assumptions" about the way we interact with the world mirror those of empiricist, positivist views of the world, wherein "the real world" is perfectly accessible to the trained observer. For Stowe, Holmes is not just a deductive machine, he is an empiricist exemplar, a model for the positivist science of Victorian England, one whose

simple view of the world is eventually overshadowed by more complex readings later in the twentieth century.

However, many contemporary readers prefer the science on display in Holmes's drawing room, and though Colin Bruce uses this style of thought to approach scientific concepts Conan Doyle never considered or was aware of, others find the science on display in the canon quite interesting in itself. Of these, E. J. Wagner's *The Science of Sherlock Holmes: From Baskerville Hall to the Valley of Fear, the Real Forensics Behind the Detective's Greatest Cases* (2006) approaches the canonical tales as a portal through which the evolution of criminology can be seen. Wagner asserts in his introduction that "Sherlock Holmes may have been fictional, but what we learn from him is very real. He tells us that science provides not simplistic answers but a rigorous method of formulating questions that may lead to answers...Holmes stands for human reason" (Wagner viii). This blurring of the divide between fiction and reality is a fundamental characteristic of Holmes's continuing presence, as texts like William Baring-Gould's *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street* (1962) exemplify, and it is equally interesting that this fiction is valuable for practical purposes. Wagner relies on this practicality in his book, using Holmes's interests and displayed skills with a variety of forensic and criminological techniques (postmortem examinations, animal clues, poisons, disguise, mug shots and criminal data, fingerprinting, forgery, and more) to discuss the historical situation of various eras of criminology. In so doing, he establishes not only that Holmes was generally quite up-to-date with his methods and ideas, but also that the character was used as a model by forensic experts as well. Wagner notes that one Dr. Edmond Locard, practitioner of medicine and law, "was a reader and an admirer of...Conan Doyle, and he suggested that

students of forensic science read the Sherlock Holmes tales as examples of proper scientific approach and to obtain a perspective on the new directions forensic science might take” (Wagner 106). Holmes was not only the protagonist of a popular mystery series, he was a teaching tool—and has remained one.

Following Wagner’s model, James O’Brien’s *The Scientific Sherlock Holmes: Cracking the Case with Science and Forensics* (2013) establishes the role of science within the stories directly, looking at the exact moments when Holmes relies upon scientific models and techniques to fully demonstrate the importance of such thinking for the character. Reading over the canon again, O’Brien asserts that a “strong component of the character's ongoing appeal and success is his knowledge of science and frequent use of the scientific method” (O’Brien xiv). For the author, a Professor of Chemistry, the science within the stories is sufficiently interesting to draw readers’ attention, and it “lends credibility to his impressive powers of reasoning...among the best-loved stories involving the detective, those that rely not just on deductive reasoning but also employ elements of science are regarded the most highly” (xiv). Though perhaps bearing the biased perspective of a scientist, his assertion that the stories have staying power in part *because of* their use of science—and that those stories that focus on this aspect of the character are the best—illustrates the import and longevity of Conan Doyle’s efforts among certain audiences.

In O’Brien’s estimation, the value of the scientific components in the canonical stories stems from the realism they provide for the character and narrative:

Science lent a robustness and complexity to the stories that contributed to their authenticity and provoked thought in the readers. In fact, it was Conan Doyle's idea from the start that a consulting detective who divined solutions in the absence of science and the scientific method would stretch even the simplest



credulity. But one who applied the scientific method actively would challenge readers' faculties and impress everyone with a resourcefulness that, although occasionally improbable, was never impossible. (O'Brien 155)

The word selection here is quite telling, as O'Brien's (and Conan Doyle's) dismissal of non-scientific reasoning as divination implies an association between science and demystification—a relationship that Holmes advances regularly, most famously in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902). Further, the intentionality of this on the part of Conan Doyle, that he sought to present a detective audiences might believe to be real, suggests a shift in popular expectations for detection and reasoning. Audiences were not expected to find much of interest in crime-stopping that did not fit into the ongoing cultural narrative of scientific prowess and the authority of reason. Presented with such a figure, readers responded quite dramatically, some even going so far as to expand the realism of the stories to the characters they presented beyond Baring-Gould's game and writing pleading letters to 221B Baker Street asking the detective for help.<sup>4</sup>

Bruce, Wagner, and O'Brien's texts clearly show the strength of audience association between Holmes and science and/or scientific thinking, despite critiques of the Holmes method from critics like Kathleen Gregory Klein and Joseph Keller. Their argument in "Deductive Detective Fiction: The Self-Destructive Genre" provides a fundamental correction of Holmes's description of his techniques in the recognition "that fictional detectives like Holmes and Dupin are abductive rather than deductive" (157). The difference between abduction and deduction exists in the construction of explanation or causation, as purely deductive logic cannot account for the creative explanatory act

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<sup>4</sup> For a number of years mail addressed to Holmes's 221B Baker Street address would arrive at the Abbey National Building Society, which occupied the 219-229 Baker Street locations. Mail now goes to the Sherlock Holmes Museum, located exactly at 221B Baker Street, despite the modification to the street numbering that this required.

produced by most detectives; abduction is imaginative explanation constrained by the facts, while deduction relies on the same facts but cannot produce the possible explanations by itself. Klein and Keller further state that abductive detective fiction forces a recognition that “fictional detectives, like all problem solvers, are predisposed to fill in an unfamiliar frame with the kinds of material that make the frame make familiar sense” (159); that is, while detectives might assert that their conclusions come exclusively from formal, objective logic, they must rely on personal, subjective experience to produce answers that make sense to them and their audiences. The upshot of this for Klein and Keller is that because these authors “took as a given orthodox assumptions about the definitive nature of thinking—that it is masculinist, linearly rational, logical...they provided their readers with precisely what would have been validated by social expectation” (156). The belief that the detectives were thinking purely logically is not simply presented by the texts, it is accepted by the culture in which they appear and reinforces that belief.

Recognizing that in “precipitating or following the first hesitant inkling that we may be onto something and the subsequent hypothesis occurs a nonlogical, sometimes irrational insight whose gestation remains utterly obscure” (160) implies a kind of “black box” activity within the brain that cannot be fully studied and is entirely non-scientific, but this is not cause to deny Holmes a certain kind of scientific status. As Klein and Keller note, “Deductive detective fiction, like its milieu, is male, linear, scientific, and objective in its self-representation although not in reality. As a societal bulwark, such a view of the world is unchallengeable” (165). Their reading of the situation implies that the science presented by Holmes is far less a function of pure logic or some kind of

purely scientific reasoning and instead must be seen as a social construction; Holmes's science is not scientific, it is cultural. The "thinking machine" that is Sherlock Holmes was never a neutral entity:

The deductive detective novel succeeded in a patriarchal and logocentric world in which the possibility of...alternative modes of thinking and defining the issues was kept firmly out of sight. So the supposed ratiocinative, masculinist methods of the male detectives who glittered in the Golden Age of detective fiction reinforced a male dominated cultural myth. (166)

Klein and Keller compellingly argue that the vision of the world presented and supported by Holmes is dismissive of women and minorities, and through its reliance upon the strength of its "rational" perspective it gained startling longevity. Such a critique would have to engage with the "logical" bases of the cultural narratives—a shockingly difficult task.

Recognition of Holmes's cultural value as a promoter of masculinist science beliefs and rhetoric appears in Joseph Kestner's excellent *Sherlock's Men* (1997), which brings Klein and Keller's argument into line with O'Brien's reading of Conan Doyle's intentions regarding science:

Conan Doyle associates his detective and Holmes's methods with two significant elements: the relation of fiction to actuality [This claim is made in relation to Conan Doyle's statement that "It is all very well to sneer at the paper detective, but a principle is a principle, whether in fiction or in fact," found on the same page] and the association of Holmes with qualities gendered masculine in Victorian culture: science, reason, system and principle. This nexus of Holmes/reason/masculinity/actuality reveals Conan Doyle's genuine project in the detective narratives. (Kestner 28)

Basing much of his book around this claim, Kestner makes a compelling argument that Sherlock Holmes existed as both a figure of entertainment and a model for masculine behavior—both implicitly and intentionally. Central to modeling masculinity, at least for Conan Doyle, is the training and application of logical skill, which is useful for both

understanding and controlling the world around oneself. A logic of mastery is at play here, and the “nexus” in which Holmes is enmeshed implies a broadly construed command of nature, couched in terms that fit such control into a naturalized framework of action and knowledge. Further, the detective is once again associated not just with fiction but with the real world, such that readers are meant not to think of the stories presented to them as a kind of escape but instead as a demonstration of the masculine power to command and control. If the detective is fictional, without presence in the real world, his attitudes and beliefs are not.

Central to Conan Doyle’s project, which the author himself described as the creation of a “modern masculine novel” (Kestner 38), is the focus on reason and science, which are the tools that promised to grant the control sought after as an ideal of masculinity. Kestner argues that “Inscribing Holmes as a paradigm of masculinity...required various strategies by Conan Doyle, of one of which he was fundamentally the inventor...the alignment of the detective with rational process and more specifically with scientific procedures and attitudes” (30). This persuasive argument cleverly recognizes the association between reason and masculinity and thus also between science and control. The majority of Kestner’s book explores the subtle shifts in this attempt to provide a masculine model across the various eras of Holmes’s canon, from his Victorian origins through Edwardian and even Georgian changes to the character’s status as an ideal male; as such, it necessarily provides regular notes on the detective’s relationship to women as presented by Conan Doyle. This involves arguing that Holmes and Watson establish two possibilities of masculine identity construction (71) and clarifying that once the short stories begin, “the narrative, in attempting to define

masculinity, conceives of women as both transgressive and as seriously threatening to the male and the male codes” (77). In sum, “Holmes’s belief that women are fundamentally alien to the male” (35) appears throughout the canonical texts and is a basic component of Conan Doyle’s construction of masculinity.

For these modern scholars, Holmes functions as an exemplar of scientific thinking and the scientific method, appearing not only as an explainer of the world as per Moretti but as one who receives much of his authority from reason, logic, and a positivist/empiricist view of the world. This belief in the real world and our ability to access it through scientific thought fails to recognize the importance of creativity and insists upon the pure logic of its strategies, blinding Holmes and his contemporaries to the limits imposed on their imagination by their cultures. In particular, this scientific quality in Holmes is fully limited by its association with Victorian masculinity and control alongside a particularly dismissive view of women. This leads to critiques of women throughout the canon and, as the following section will explore, a systemic problem of objectivity within science that persists today. As we will see, despite some ambivalence regarding the changing powers and roles of women in Victorian society, Holmes retains a rather misogynist attitude and reinstates a protective patriarchal role over the “New Woman” of his era. A striking parallel exists between this attitude in the fiction and that of real scientists in the real world; in this as well, Holmes’s actions are more real than his fictional status implies.

## Holmes and the Feminine

Published in *The Baker Street Journal*, Marcia Caudell and Yvonne DeTar's article "Sherlock Holmes and the Women of the 90s: A Feminist Perspective" (2000) argues that Holmes's relationship with women had been unfairly misrepresented by exploring both the appearance of women in Conan Doyle's original narratives and Holmes's interactions with them, attempting to prove that the great detective is actually quite sensitive to and critical of the problems faced by women at the turn of the century. The two authors assert that "Contrary to his reputation as a misogynistic, unemotional, unfeeling machine, we women of the '90s (the 1990s, that is) recognize Holmes's sensitivity, tenderness, and compassion...[alongside] an understanding of women far beyond that of men in his time" (38). Caudell and DeTar rely upon canonical moments in which Holmes speaks highly of women, including his statement in *The Sign of Four* (1890) that Mary Morstan "had a decided genius" that might be of use (378), or needs the help of women to solve his cases, as when Mrs. Hudson distracts a gunman outside the Baker Street residence in "The Adventure of the Empty House" (803). The two also place great weight on Holmes's relationship with Irene Adler, noting that based upon his statements in "A Scandal in Bohemia," "Holmes thought Irene could trust her own judgment more than she could a man's" (39), recognizing that she was just as capable a thinker as anyone. Further, their argument opens with a reading of the detective's habit of carrying a pocket edition of Petrarch's sonnets (noted in 1891's "The Boscombe Valley Mystery"), finding in that detail a mind sensitive to expressions of love beyond those of an observer's disinterested examinations. Caudell and DeTar simply "do not recognize

any misogynistic leanings in Holmes” (40), finding him to be a forward-thinking figure, due admiration for his views in place of scorn.<sup>5</sup>

This argument implies that traditional readings of the canonical texts asserting the sleuth’s misogyny might be more received arguments than fully supportable claims, and the authors place the blame for the mischaracterization squarely on “a false characterization of Watson’s words in ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’” (40). Their argument is that Watson’s interpretation of Holmes’s critical statements on women should be taken as the doctor’s limited understanding of the detective’s intent, which is clever but fails to acknowledge the extensive list of statements and actions performed by the detective that undercut their claim. Throughout the canon, Sherlock Holmes acts with disdain and disregard for women, and while there are a few moments periodically wherein the sleuth acts respectfully toward them (and his omnipresent courtesy deserves some recognition), the harshness of his attitude outside their presence cannot be so easily discounted. With this dual view in mind, this section will provide an overview of Holmes’s interactions with women and critical reaction to the canonical tales, demonstrating that though there is some room to argue for a more complex treatment of his attitudes and actions, the detective remains largely disinterested in and critical of women. This section will conclude with several scholars’ awareness that the canonical Holmes is not simply put off by women but that his difficulties with their presence suggest that women in and of themselves undercut the empirical framework he so completely believes in.

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<sup>5</sup> Though not perhaps within the scope of this essay, the sexualization of Holmes is certainly of note, especially in recent adaptations of the character, and may have its canonical source in the moments Caudell and DeTar uncover; Annisa M. Graham and Jennifer C. Garlen discuss this in more detail in their “Sex and the Single Sleuth,” published in *Sherlock Holmes for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2012), noting the wealth of fan fiction featuring sexualized portrayals of the detective (30).

The canonical Holmes has much to say of women and women's abilities, with significant evidence for a negative view found in early material while other texts contain useful additional clues. The earliest material cited to demonstrate the detective's misogyny appears in *The Sign of Four*, in which Watson exclaims over the striking appearance of a young woman while Holmes remains unmoved:

"Is she?" he said, languidly. "I did not observe."

"You really are an automaton—a calculating-machine!" I cried. "There is something positively inhuman in you at times."

He smiled gently. "It is of the first importance," he said, "not to allow your judgment to be biased by personal qualities. A client is to me a mere unit—a factor in a problem. The emotional qualities are antagonistic to clear reasoning. I assure you that the most winning woman I ever knew was hanged for poisoning three little children for their insurance-money, and the most repellant man of my acquaintance is a philanthropist who has spent nearly a quarter of a million upon the London poor." (235)

Widely referenced as proof of the detective's lack of interest in women, this quote more effectively establishes his claims for objectivity and only secondarily implies a kind of asexuality. The sense that "personal qualities" can be a basis for bias and that "emotional qualities" cloud the mind's ability to reason effectively are less a complaint that women are, in themselves, a problem, and more fully represent a dismissal of the humanity expected by Watson and found wanting. In fact, Holmes even notes that there are "winning" women and "repellent" men, suggesting perhaps that there might be intelligent women as well. Later in the text, however, Holmes implies that there may be something wrong with women, stating that "I would not tell them too much... Women are never entirely to be trusted—not the best of them" (311). This statement might be read charitably as a statement of cultural critique, suggesting that women have been conditioned to share what they know, but this requires unnecessary mental gymnastics.



Holmes simply does not believe that women are capable of maintaining trust no matter their other qualities; they are essentially flawed in this.

The detective's attitude toward women comes into fuller focus in "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891), beginning again with a restatement of the objectivity claim. The narrative of this short story focuses on Holmes's attempt to catch the tale's criminal, Irene Adler, who successfully thwarts these attempts. Her skill at evading Holmes and her status as "THE woman" in Holmes's life has made her the focus of significant fan attention and expansion in later adaptations and pastiches. Watson's opening description of Holmes's thoughts on Adler deserves quotation in full:

To Sherlock Holmes she is always THE woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex. It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen, but as a lover he would have placed himself in a false position. He never spoke of the softer passions, save with a gibe and a sneer. They were admirable things for the observer—excellent for drawing the veil from men's motives and actions. But for the trained reasoner to admit such intrusions into his own delicate and finely adjusted temperament was to introduce a distracting factor which might throw a doubt upon all his mental results. Grit in a sensitive instrument, or a crack in one of his own high-power lenses, would not be more disturbing than a strong emotion in a nature such as his. And yet there was but one woman to him, and that woman was the late Irene Adler. (5-6)

The contradiction in Watson's claim, that Holmes has no need for "the softer passions" but there was "one woman to him," implies some of the tensions regarding women throughout the canon. Watson proposes here that the "distracting factor" of love is problematic as a disturbance and thus a concern for observation, and perhaps even that Holmes's awareness of possible susceptibility to it in himself, kept himself away from the possibility. In this light, later authors' interest in placing the detective into romantic situations with Adler seems inevitable. At the same time, the fact that women create this

emotional reaction is a slight against them for Holmes, as they muddy the waters of objectivity by their very presence, and thus must be kept away from careful analysis. This does not logically preclude women from being capable of making their own analyses or whether this might be possible in the presence or absence of men, but that line of reasoning is not followed in the story or the canon.

Instead, Holmes goes on to make some rather reductive comments about women and their beliefs and habits. Considering the decision-making habits of women under stress, the detective notes that “When a woman thinks that her house is on fire, her instinct is at once to rush to the thing which she values most. It is a perfectly overpowering impulse ...A married woman grabs at her baby; an unmarried one reaches for her jewel-box” (33). Why this should be true of all women in all circumstances Holmes does not discuss, nor does he explain why this might not also be the case for the majority of men. Here the sleuth reveals an essentializing perspective (all women follow the pattern, subcategories follow variations on the pattern) and a strangely material focus expected of women. This essentialization continues throughout the narrative, as the detective notes just a few lines previously that “Women are naturally secretive, and they like to do their own secreting” (30). Attempting to divine the location of a photograph, Holmes uses this as the basis for his search, holding the belief that women are inherently stealthy secret keepers, and while it is true that Holmes relies on this kind of broad logical claim throughout the stories, it is more rare that they apply to a group of people as broad as “women.” Reductive categorization characterizes the vast majority of his interactions and statements regarding women, though the existence of Irene Adler remains problematic.

At the conclusion of “A Scandal in Bohemia,” Watson notes that Holmes “used to make merry over the cleverness of women, but I have not heard him do it of late. And when he speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honourable title of *the* woman” (40). Initially, this may imply that Holmes once had a negative view of women’s reasoning capabilities but has now changed his mind—or at least changed his habit of openly mocking them. The fact that the detective keeps a picture of the woman could further this line of reasoning or could perhaps indicate a desire to be reminded of a mistake to avoid making it again, and Watson may have read this gesture through his own romantic perspective. However, the denomination of Adler as “the woman” suggests instead that she merely identified an error in Holmes’s reasoning process—that women *could* not reason at this level—while confirming in his mind that most are incapable of doing so. The definite article and the lack of possible candidates beyond Adler suggests an exception that proves the rule, especially since the remainder of the canonical texts show Holmes returning to his pre-Adler opinion of women.

In “A Case of Identity” (1891) noting a potential female client’s hesitation in approaching the Baker Street door, Holmes asserts that

Oscillation upon the pavement always means an *affaire de coeur*. She would like advice, but is not sure that the matter is not too delicate for communication. And yet even here we may discriminate. When a woman has been seriously wronged by a man she no longer oscillates, and the usual symptom is a broken bell wire. Here we may take it that there is a love matter, but that the maiden is not so much angry as perplexed, or grieved. (78)

The ease of analysis here is certainly a Holmes trademark, but the assumption here that a man is involved is somewhat curious, implying that no other reason might cause hesitation—indeed, that there *are* no other reasons for women beyond men. Further in the

story, Holmes decides *not* to inform his client of the full situation in which she found herself, asserting that

If I tell her she will not believe me. You may remember the old Persian saying, “There is danger for him who taketh the tiger cub, and danger also for whoso snatches a delusion from a woman.” There is as much sense in Hafiz as in Horace, and as much knowledge of the world. (100)

Leaving aside the orientalist rhetoric, there is a paternalistic, patronizing attitude in this statement, implying that embracing delusions is a particularly feminine quality and that women should not be told the truth. As this is the fifth publication featuring Holmes (and appears after the more striking claims of both *The Sign of Four* and “A Scandal in Bohemia”), the perspective shown here continues the association of the detective with a belief in the limited capacities of women.

Much more material exists, from Holmes’s assertion that “the motives of women are so inscrutable” (1203) in “The Adventure of the Second Stain” (1904) and his belief that “one of the most dangerous classes in the world...is the drifting and friendless woman,” who “is the inevitable inciter of crime in others” (1363) as stated in “The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax” (1911), to the statement in “The Adventure of the Illustrious Client” (1924) in which he says “Woman’s heart and mind are insoluble puzzles to the male...murder might be condoned or explained, and yet some smaller offence might rankle” (1458) and Watson’s claim in “The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter” (1893) that “His aversion to women and his disinclination to form new friendships were both typical of his unemotional character” (635) or even Holmes’s own admission that he is “not a whole-souled admirer of womankind” (704) in *The Valley of Fear* (1914-15). These direct references make up only a small portion of textual

representations of women, many of which implicitly continue the patronization, and this list provides some proof for a consistently negative attitude toward females.

That said, there are a few places where Holmes recognizes women's capabilities beyond that mentioned in "A Scandal in Bohemia." In the 1891 story "The Man with the Twisted Lip," the detective notes in an aside to Watson that he has "seen too much not to know that the impression of a woman may be more valuable than the conclusion of an analytical reasoner" (183), clearly recognizing that women are capable of noting details and information more effectively than some analysts. And, as Caudell and DeTar are aware, Holmes is quite comfortable in the presence of women, remaining quite courteous and capable of easy reassurance. Watson recognizes this in "The Adventure of the Golden Pince-Nez" (1904) telling the reader that he has "remarked before that Holmes had, when he liked, a peculiarly ingratiating way with women, and that he very readily established terms of confidence with them" (1111). Watson's sense of these capabilities' peculiarity points toward Holmes's distaste for women, and the ability to remain civil and to easily manipulate women in distress is not proof of respect or positive opinion—especially given Holmes's knowledge that being agreeable in no way excludes a propensity for poison. The apparent contradictions facing scholars attempting to determine a definitive perspective are problematic, though it would seem that significantly more evidence rests on the side of a desire to avoid the company of women—a polite misogyny.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Looking for consistency within the canonical texts can provoke significant consternation, as details often shift—the name of Watson's wife and the location of his war wound, for instance. That said, this irregularity may be one source for consistent interest in the canon.

These issues have encourages scholars interested in the role of women within the canon, and recent scholarship reveals a complex recognition of Holmes's mistrust of women operating culturally as a mirror for Victorian confusion. In the face of the freedoms acquired by women in this time, stories such as Conan Doyle's provide an avenue through which men use science and observation to reassert control over women's lives. This understanding of the role of women places them securely parallel to the criminals Holmes catches and in need of ordering, which the critical reading places squarely within the effects of the analytical, controlling power of the detective. Elizabeth Carolyn Miller's "Private Lives and Public Eyes: Sherlock Holmes and the Invisible Women" (2008) recognizes these complexities while arguing that the broader effect of Holmes's interventions into the lives of women marks a growing willingness to accept women in the public sphere. This comfort does not come easily, as Holmes "finds his visual acumen continually thwarted by the female body's resistance to interpretation" according to Miller, who reads "Conan Doyle's female criminals"—Irene Adler in particular—as a challenge to "the stories' innovative faith in the power of vision and detection, their empiricism, their panopticism, their modern certainty about identity's location in the body, and their revolutionary merging of the science of crime and the science of physiology" (26). These women, operating in the liminal space between the expected private life of the home and the public space newly opened by contemporary legislation,<sup>7</sup> frustrate the detective's attempts to "read" them. Analyzing Holmes's difficulties with Adler, Miller asserts that the criminal "is not only memorable because she outwits him, but because she embodies something distinctively womanly...he

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<sup>7</sup> Some of these include the 1853 Act for the Better Prevention and Punishment of Aggravated Assaults upon Women and Children, the 1890 Matrimonial Causes Act, the 1873 Custody of Infants Act, and, importantly for its impact on public life and property, the Married Women's Property Act of 1884.

subsumes her whole identity into womanliness, as though ‘woman’ signifies that which he cannot account for” (49). With Adler at the forefront, Miller recognizes Holmes’s difficulties with women as a demonstration of the problems men faced in dealing with these “new women”; the traditional methods of observation and analysis seemed less useful than before.

Toward the end of her essay, Miller recognizes that depicting such shocking women was part of a strategy seeking to “commodify feminine victimization,” banking “on the allure of feminine disobedience for women” (69). This is not a problem for her because such representations opened a significant cultural critique: the idea that “paternalistic, private familial structures depended on the belief that women and children were *better off* when taken care of under the auspices of patriarchy...is utterly exploded in the Holmes stories” (55, emphasis in original). The shocking number of men acting badly toward women—particularly in the secrecy of their private lives—undercuts the idea that they should be completely walled-off from the public, and the narratives of women behaving badly allows for the revelation of their causes. For Miller, “The Holmes stories tacitly support an ideology of interventionism...erasing the legal boundary between public and private, which functioned...to cordon women off from political and social power” (57). The work done by Conan Doyle, despite the negative view of women possessed by his protagonist, manages to provide support for the laws that opened public life to women. And in making the social and political lives of women more possible, Miller finds much to be recognized in the narratives, including the difficulty of the empirical scientific gaze to fully define the women upon which it rests.

The critique of that gaze and its explanatory power is less potent in Lisa Surridge's "Are Women Protected? Sherlock Holmes and the Violent Home" (2005), in which she locates Holmes's capacity to resolve these crimes as a controlling act that reasserts patriarchal domination over the women whom he saves or allows to go free. Asserting that "the Holmes narratives seek to dispel late-Victorian gender anxieties" (220), Surridge contends that the "Sherlock Holmes stories...participate in [a] reassuring discourse whereby the threat of female independence is countered by a crime narrative in which the woman needs male protection" (226). Though not focused on the limit case of Adler, the claim made here is quite convincing:

Holmes, then, not only polices aberrant men...but embodies their idealized opposite. Self-controlled, reasoning, protective of women, the late-Victorian Holmes reassured *Strand* readers that male violence was amenable to social control, and indeed that readers, occupying the space of surrogate detectives, could participate in that control. (227)

Miller's claim that women's new entrance into the public sphere destabilized Holmes's ability to perceive and order the world faces a counterpoint with Surridge's reading, in which that very crisis is forced into the uniformity of Victorian culture through Holmes's performance of masculinity for his audience. For Surridge, "Holmes's role as [a] 'strong' and 'masterful' ...protector of abused women intimated...that women *were still in need of protection*, that the feminism of the 1890s had not made redundant the male protective role that formed the basis of patriarchal society" (227-228, emphasis in original). While the newly public women of the Victorian era weaken the empirical gaze of detectives like Holmes, that deterioration occurs in tandem with the resolution of the criminal behavior by the detective. Both Miller and Surridge read the texts creatively, and their interpretations work together to show the complexity of the situation and the value of women in presenting that multi-layered condition.



The treatment of women by Holmes is also central to Christopher Metress's recognition that Conan Doyle himself had worries over reason's power to resolve all problems. Exploring a story that the detective's creator kept out of collections, the essay "Thinking the Unthinkable: Reopening Conan Doyle's 'Cardboard Box'" (2001) explores Holmes's difficulty with preventing wife abuse. Beginning with the claim that "any reading of the Holmes stories must recognize that...they are, above all else, celebrating the power of reason, venerating the human intellect and its ability to penetrate the mysterious surfaces of the world and explain the workings of the universe as rational and fully knowable" (Metress 185), Metress demonstrates that in "The Adventure of the Cardboard Box" Holmes's difficulties in determining a solution for the abuse of married women points at the limits of reason itself. In the tale, a humiliated man, Jim Browner, mutilates his wife and her lover, eventually confessing his guilt and explaining his rationale, demonstrating his analytical skills and reasoned behavior to the authorities—which Metress reads as Conan Doyle making Browner a shadow version of Holmes (Metress 192-193). After his narrative is heard and his story told, Holmes confesses his confusion to Watson:

What object is served by this circle of misery and violence and fear? It must tend to some end, or else our universe is ruled by chance, which is unthinkable. But what end? There is the great standing perennial problem to which human reason is as far from an answer as ever. (*New Annotated Novels* 448)

This rather shocking admission prompts Metress to assert that Browner's similarity to Holmes both "qualifies the larger narrative's celebration of reason as an enlightening force" and "implies that 'reason' can be used as a tool to destroy others, can be a means by which we darken, not enlighten the world" (Metress 193).

Critically, Holmes's difficulties and Browner's situation revolve around women, and though Metress does not engage with this aspect of the text, it is fundamental to the narrative. Browner's crimes come after a seduction attempt from his sister-in-law, and his actions are prompted by his wife's adultery. His murderous solution to the problem of female influence in his life is impossibly cruel, and his ability to use Holmes's techniques of observation and analysis to pursue violence suggests their neutrality instead of any inherent goodness. Concluding his analysis, Metress suggests that "Browner's confession calls into question the way in which Holmes—and by extension, Conan Doyle—assumes that the universe is ordered" (194). There is no bias toward a positive outcome with reason, and rationality, science, or empiricism will not in and of themselves produce "good." Metress's work continues to support the link between women and the limits of empirical thinking, indicating a fissure within the canon regarding Holmes's capacities.

Usefully capping this thread, Laurie Langbauer makes an excellent case for Holmes's observation and attention to detail as strikingly blind when matters of the "everyday"—here strongly associated with women—appear. In her "The City, the Everyday, and Boredom: The Case of Sherlock Holmes" (1993), Langbauer links the absence of women in Holmes and Watson's life at 221B to their attempt to avoid "boredom," arguing that the fantasy of "an integral self...has been strong-armed by culture into a masculine fantasy because woman has been made the vehicle enabling it" (Langbauer 83). That is, women have been made to represent a dispersed self, one spread over relationships and everyday activities and encounters, and Holmes's flight from this is part of the cultural representation that supports the assertion that female "dailiness" is non-masculine. Removing women from Holmes's personal life save in the form of

domestic servitude makes “woman” into “a useful scapegoat who sacrificially purges the problems of boredom” (Langbauer 83). More directly,

...by taking women as one cause of Holmes’s boredom, Arthur Conan Doyle’s stories suggest that by dispensing with women (as the neat society of Holmes and Watson continually tries to do—witness the death of Watson’s wife or wives), a man can dispense with the threats that underlie boredom. (Langbauer 84)

This structure positions the boredom that the pair of investigators avoid within the realm of the everyday, while leaving open an interesting contradiction of analysis. For Holmes, boredom can be staved off through pursuing a difficult case, and solving such cases often requires careful attention to apparently quotidian details. Thus for Langbauer, Holmes is both hyper-aware of these details and highly dismissive of them, implying a distinction that seems to have no functional difference.

In her critique, Langbauer argues that within the male world of Sherlock Holmes we must recognize “women’s identification with a bankrupt dailiness—a marginalization that renders women so far outside the fears and fantasies still available to men that they become indifferent to them” (84), and that “Women have been especially marginalized through those cultural practices that theorists tend to characterize as belonging to the everyday—domestic maintenance, the repetitive production of food and children” (91). This organization privileges certain kinds of detail and observation over others, and Langbauer asserts that this is a central fantasy of Holmesian deductive observation and empiricism. Certain details matter while others do not, and in all cases only the masculine vision of these details has cultural weight. She argues that while “Holmes’s method is to try to account for every everyday gesture...the boredom in the stories...suggests to me that there is something more going on in them” (92), namely that the cultural work done by Holmes is not limited to making the description of the world a masculine enterprise

but also includes the constraining of women's spaces within that world to a boring, everyday existence. Langbauer suggests that other visions of daily work are necessary to challenge the model established by Holmes, and an equally important task is the disentanglement of women from this particular perspective.

The work done to dispute this Holmesian (and thus Victorian) masculinist-scientific view of the world does not occur immediately in fiction featuring Holmes, despite the importance of rhetoric in support of the worldview. Before it begins, an extensive criticism of the bases supporting the empiricist vision of the world occurs, with social studies of science deconstructing the positivist assumptions surrounding scientific endeavor. The most critical of these, that science as an activity describes the real world accurately and produces truth, was completely exploded, and feminist critics took the concerns regarding scientific accuracy as a chance to produce a fuller critique of the masculine biases. These feminist critics walk a fine line between the dismissal of science as a field capable of understanding reality and the value of reason and rationality, and understanding their work is extremely valuable for understanding the work done by Laurie King in her book.

### **Feminist Critique of Science**

The Victorian cultural vision of science—as represented by Sherlock Holmes—is strongly associated with a bias toward masculinized reason and logic, and the examples from the first section above show that Holmes and his biases continue to exemplify scientific thinking in the twenty-first century. It is therefore no surprise that in the philosophy of science and history of science, much of the critical investigation in the

second half of the twentieth century has focused on the assumptions grouped with that masculinization, often focusing on female capacity for reason and scientific thought. Interest in this field has immediate practical value, as Jocelyn Steinke's work on representations of women scientists demonstrates. In her 1997 essay "A Portrait of a Woman Scientist: Breaking Down Barriers Created by Gender-Role Stereotypes," she investigates the "attitudinal barriers that keep girls from participating in science," finding that even at the end of the twentieth century

girls and young women are more likely to think of scientists as male and of science as a masculine subject; to develop negative attitudes toward science, scientists, and extracurricular science activities; to lose confidence in their ability to succeed in science; and to view science as masculine. (Steinke "A Portrait" 409)

Much of this stereotyping occurs due to limited numbers of female scientist role models, parents' belief in persistent stereotypes regarding girls' difficulties with math and science, and the gender stereotypes of scientists presented in the media ("A Portrait" 410). Women scientists can be found in media portrayals, but these examples downplay their expertise, focus on the difficulties of maintaining professional and personal lives, and emphasize that masculine traits are necessary to be a successful scientist ("A Portrait" 412). Despite significant advancement for women in legal rights and freedoms over the twentieth century, science remains a field that girls and young women often find daunting and/or unpalatable.

In her later "Cultural Representations of Gender and Science: Portrayals of Female Scientists and Engineers in Popular Film" (2005), Steinke returns to the topic and finds both encouraging developments and persistent problems. Though the vast majority of female scientists in the films she examines were presented as "professional and realistic" ("Cultural" 41), a similar majority of such characters appear as unrealistically

beautiful or, if not already such, are made so over the course of the film (38-29).

Additionally, romance is a central focus of female scientists' lives (49), and only a small minority of films featured women science professionals with a family (51). Steinke's research shows positive growth in presentations of women scientists, yet there remain significant problems in the details of these representations. As a cultural narrative, female scientists remain heavily associated with socially "feminine" themes, including the acquisition of a romantic partner and an emphasis on physical beauty, but a growing number of narratives simply featuring women as successful scientists gives cause for some hope. The persistence of limited expectations regarding feminine skill with math and science is striking, and the continuance of Victorian models of science like Holmes does not help the situation.

The improvement of these depictions, limited though it may be in many ways, stems largely from critical explorations of the masculinist-scientific amalgam. Criticisms of the positivist empiricism of the Victorian period came not only from unexpected scientific developments in the first half of the twentieth century (largely in the field of subatomic physics) but also philosophical challenges to the empiricist model of knowledge acquisition. Discoveries like the double-slit experiment and the uncertainty principle tested the belief that science could successfully determine singular truths, while a return to Hume's disbelief in the possibility of certainty in observation-based knowledge began a philosophical shift in the expectations for the acquisition of information. This latter rests at the base of the postmodern critique of science, which, in forcing a wide re-evaluation of the master narratives of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, established questions regarding the essential capacity of science to objectively

describe reality. Relying upon this start provided by critics like Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend, and Bruno Latour, feminist critics began an investigation into the masculine biases of scientific work, but their analysis bumped up against a problem for reason and logic they had not foreseen.

Setting up the breadth of the dilemma beautifully, Donna Haraway explains in her “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” (1991) that “feminists have both selectively and flexibly used and been trapped by two poles of a tempting dichotomy on the question of objectivity” (Haraway 183). She establishes the first pole as based on

recent social studies of science and technology [that] have made available a very strong social constructivist argument for all forms of knowledge claims, most certainly and especially scientific ones...Social constructionists make clear that official ideologies about objectivity and scientific method are particularly bad guides to how scientific knowledge is actually made. Just as for the rest of us, what scientists believe or say they do and what they really do have a very loose fit. (183-184)

Generally speaking, the social constructionists make the claim that the knowledge produced by scientific discovery is not functionally “about” anything real—it is constructed by a particular kind of reasoning and then confirmed socially by others who use the same process of reasoning. Philosophers and historians of science find that this vision of what science actually does is particularly useful for understanding paradigm shifts and what might be thought of as “erroneous” science, and feminist critics of science have used it to support their claims for institutional bias, as will be discussed below.

Haraway’s other pole for feminist scientists involves a natural outgrowth of this social constructivist model, which establishes quite centrally the overall impossibility of avoiding uncertainty. Simply put, if social constructivists argue that scientific knowledge

is not actually about anything in the real world—that the real world is essentially impossible to access from a situated human position—then knowledge itself is fundamentally compromised. Haraway reads this other side somewhat apocalyptically:

This is a terrifying view of the relationship of body and language for those of us who would still like to talk about *reality* with more confidence than we allow the Christian right's discussion of the Second Coming and their being raptured out of the final destruction of the world. We would like to think our appeals to real worlds are more than a desperate lurch away from cynicism and an act of faith like any other cult's, no matter how much space we generously give to all the rich and always historically specific mediations through which we and everybody else must know the world. (Haraway 185, emphasis in original)

A fundamental problem of the social constructivist position (particularly the strong variety) is an attendant sense that if science does not tell us the “truth” then any attempt to talk about reality is equivalent; in Haraway’s extreme description science is the same as religion. As one possible extension of the critical position established in the first pole, this reading of social constructivism forces feminist critics into a difficult (though regularly exaggerated) position: if they maintain that there are social factors to science, then they suggest that all science is subjective; if they back away from this, then they risk reinstating the biased science that they had previously critiqued.

Finding safe ground for this mode of critique is quite difficult and is roughly similar to suggesting that some science is bad and other science is good—a tough, subjective position to defend. However, significant work has been done in feminist critiques of science that manages this position effectively, and in looking at it a model emerges for a critique of fictional scientific representatives like Sherlock Holmes. The work done to create what many philosophers of science call “scientific realism” walks a fine line between critique and continuation of the scientific project, attempting to defuse the radically subjective view of the constructivists with a turn back toward possible



objectivity. Interestingly, it also parallels the work done by Laurie King in her Mary Russell mystery series, which provides a corrective for the biases in Holmes's representation of scientific reasoning. Understood in this fashion, King's books recreate feminist epistemologists' scientific realism model, in which, despite the near impossibility of perfect certainty in science, more effective, useful reasoning can still occur when a wide range of investigative agents examines the material together.

The concept of "scientific realism" stems in significant measure from criticisms of logical positivism produced by philosophers of science.<sup>8</sup> Grouped together, these thinkers looked at the actual process of science instead of the claims it made about its process, determining that belief in a simple, linear progression of scientific knowledge was entirely wrong. Kuhn, in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), argued that the problems of scientific advancement—most particularly the odd moments in which older ideas are discarded and/or new paradigms appear—demand "a historiographic revolution in the study of science" (Kuhn 3). In contributing to this revolution, Kuhn finds that maintaining any basis of a given idea in a scientific field requires "the community's willingness to defend that assumption, if necessary at considerable cost" (Kuhn 5); this leads to science dependent upon the rhetorical skill of the community and not on the inherent persuasive capacity of the "facts" to which they adhere. Considering the transition from Aristotelian to Newtonian and now Einsteinian mechanics, Kuhn notes that while he does "not doubt" that there are improvements in the ability to successfully solve puzzles in physics, he "can see in their succession no

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<sup>8</sup> Some of the relevant books not discussed in this chapter include Feyerabend's *Against Method* (1975) and Latour's *Science in Action* (1987). However, Kuhn's book is used as a general stand-in here, despite the admittedly significant differences between the three thinkers. As one might imagine, the field which is summarized here is complex, but that complexity is outside the scope of this project.

coherent direction of ontological development” (Kuhn 206). That is, there is no way to look at these models as successive or teleological by exploring their relationship, and thus it is impossible to assert that science is getting closer to the real world and its functions.

Often accused of advocating a relativist position, Kuhn and his work are criticized by empiricists who desire to maintain the ability of science to effectively describe the world and grow closer to a trustable explanation of natural phenomena. Feminist scholars of the philosophy of science, on the other hand, found that Kuhn’s work was particularly useful for explaining the problems science has had with women. In the introduction to their book *Feminist Epistemologies* (1993), Linda Alcoff and Elizabeth Potter recognize that the very idea of a “feminist epistemology” is radically at odds with “professional philosophers and...epistemology ‘proper’—that is, alien to a theory of *knowledge in general*” (Alcoff 1 emphasis in original). The idea of a more situated articulation of knowledge, in this case through gender identity concerns, is fully in line with Kuhn’s recognition that groups advocate specific knowledge claims. Furthermore, the concept of feminist epistemology (and epistemologists) challenges the “premise that a general account of knowledge, one that uncovers justificatory standards a priori, is *possible*” (Alcoff 1 emphasis in original), paralleling Kuhn’s belief that such knowledge is likely impossible. Alcoff and Potter’s book contains a number of essays from feminist scholars challenging the primacy of traditional epistemologies and, in doing so, demonstrating a subjective, postmodern shift in the study of science.

Lorraine Code, in her essay “Taking Subjectivity into Account” collected in *Feminist Epistemologies*, finds that “ideal objectivity is a generalization from the *subjectivity* of quite a small social group,” and that this “group that has the power,

security, and prestige to believe that it can generalize its experiences and normative ideals across the social order, thus producing a group of like-minded practitioners ('we') and dismissing 'others' as deviant, aberrant ('they')" (Alcoff 22 emphasis in original). As a response, she argues that feminist approaches to science should "argue that natural-scientific enquiry has to be located differently, where it can be recognized as a sociopolitical-historical activity in which knowing who the scientist is can reveal important epistemological dimensions of her or his inquiry" (Alcoff 37). Code articulates a clear belief in the subjective nature of science and knowledge, demanding that the situation of the knower be included with the assertion of knowledge, making historicization of the event easier and more obviously necessary. Continuing in this vein, in the same volume Elizabeth Grosz refers to Descartes and Hume's concerns with scientific enquiry's capacity for truth (Alcoff 188) before asserting that "If the subject of knowledge is a 'blind spot' in knowledge production in assessment, then all knowledge is necessarily contaminated by an irreducibly arational component at its core" (Alcoff 192). In this vision of the scientific world, the reasons for study and the beliefs brought to the experiment design—both embodied in the scientific investigator—cannot be ignored in analyzing the knowledge produced. Grosz's claim that the body has been left out of science studies (Alcoff 187) neatly pairs with Code's recognition of the need for situated knowledge, playing out Kuhn's assertion that science is inextricably linked with the people who practice it.

The Code and Grosz articles reside on one pole of the dilemma posed by Haraway, as their reading of science as highly subjective allows for an interesting critique of the scientific model through the lens of feminism. However, the greater the

subjectivity, the greater the likelihood of sliding into some kind of equivalence with the “cults” Haraway worries over. She is not alone in her worries, and the remainder of the critics discussed in this section seek to find some kind of middle ground that allows for some objectivity while maintaining the influence of the subjective mind. The first person to consider in this must be Evelyn Fox Keller, with her 1985 *Reflections on Gender in Science* still a touchstone in the field, in which she makes an extremely passionate case for the value of science despite its flaws. Aware that Western cultural values rely on a “division of emotional and intellectual labor,” Keller neatly establishes that “women have been the guarantors and protectors of the personal, the emotional, the particular, whereas science—the province par excellence of the impersonal, the rational, and the general—has been the preserve of men” (Keller 6-7). But instead of shifting science into the personal, she wants readers to recognize the “undeniable successes of science as well as...the commitments that have made such successes possible” (Keller 11). For Keller, a completely subjective science is one that throws the baby out with the bathwater in its failure to recognize that there seems to be something out there that the practice of science describes.

To encourage others to seek a middle ground, Keller first acknowledges the difficulty of doing science in a fully self-aware fashion, in clear recognition of the importance of science studies as a field (Keller 129). Building on this, she establishes that the kind of language used in scientific work creates an impenetrable wall because of the exactitude the doing of science requires:

Confidence in the transparency of language in turn encourages the belief that one's own language is absolute. It permits the use of linguistic identifiers not only to define membership but also in support of an exclusionary understanding that secures the borders of scientific disciplines. Language, assumed to be transparent,

becomes impervious. Closing the disciplinary borders against cross-traffic serves to protect the invisibility of all the inevitably self-reinforcing, even self-fulfilling, attributes of one's own language. The indifference of working scientists to (or their denial of) the self-enclosing nature of their language is no doubt helpful to the momentum of their research, but because it works to foreclose both internal awareness and external criticism of basic assumptions, it militates against deep-seated change. (Keller 131)

The demand for a nearly one-to-one correspondence between idea and thing in scientific writing can create the feeling that reality is structured in this “transparent” way, but as Keller explains, this is an illusionary feedback loop that establishes “reality” in a particular way and then relies upon its own rhetoric to confirm the truth of its statement. But despite these concerns, she remains wary of any “extreme relativism,” which she worries will lead to “the arbitration of truth” receding into “the political domain” (Keller 178). Her text is optimistic about the possibilities of science, and she remains committed to “the reclamation, from within science, of science as a human project instead of a masculine project” (Keller 178). Recognizing the limits of scientific rhetoric and establishing the errors made by scientists because of this rhetoric is a large part of what Keller wants to see happen in the field, because she does not wish science itself to be completely undermined.

Written in agreement with Keller, Susan Haack’s article “Science as Social? Yes and No” (1996) echoes the pro-science view, noting that while she considers sexism’s influence in science a bad thing and wishes to eliminate it, she also believes that “the aspiration to a feminist epistemology of science” pulls “toward the politicization of inquiry,” about which she is fundamentally wary (Haack 90). Postmodern analysis has worked hard to show that all inquiry is political, but Haack’s concern is valid; even if true objectivity is impossible, it remains a valuable goal that only careful scientific reasoning is ever likely to approach. Keller and Haack—along with a great many others—believe

that science has value despite its hidden subjectivities, and that the work they do to expose implicit biases is both necessary and valuable, capable of improving the field. For that reason, the negative reaction of male scientists to feminist inquiry into science surprised Elisabeth A. Lloyd, whose “Science and Anti-Science: Objectivity and Its Real Enemies” (1996) explores the various reactions and denunciations of the feminist investigations. Surprised by the vitriol of these criticisms, Lloyd realizes that they occur because of the cultural value of science as an explanatory force:

One consequence of the sciences’ central social and political role, as described above, is that a certain *image of science* must be maintained in order to ensure social and economic order: Science must be as believable and trustworthy an authority as possible. (Lloyd 221)

Even more important, “some special, authoritative, even mythic stature is psychologically necessary to the maintenance of these essential social roles and functions” (Lloyd 221), and the critical work done by feminist investigators has undermined much of this mythic power. Given the incredible value of science as a field of inquiry, one Lloyd suggests has largely replaced religion as a cultural force, the rhetoric of science remains highly exclusionary and dismissive of critique. Her points here echo those of Keller (and of Kuhn), and their recognition of the rhetorical potency of scientific terminology and rhetoric is extremely valuable for its exposure of the field’s reliance upon more than simple facts to make its case.

Lloyd indicates that this worry can be read “sympathetically” as “focusing on the *potential harm* of such studies [feminist critiques] to social life, economic prosperity, and the civic responsibility which is essential to democratic government” (Lloyd 225), though she recognizes that it also closes off the possibility of improving the sciences through criticism, upholding the patriarchal vision of science (and thus the world)

unquestioningly. She dismisses these negative reactions to the work of science simply by noting that the feminist critics in question are, in the vast majority, scientists themselves relying on scientific terminology and framing to construct and validate their concerns. She reasons that “if appeals to empirical evidence, consistency, and other scientific standards are the substance of such challenges, then they are properly seen as operating within the sciences, and as such, legitimating them” (Lloyd 225), noting at the same time that a far more fundamental critique would come through non-scientific (perhaps religious) channels and rhetorics. Lloyd’s article concludes with a call for continued critique in large measure because that will produce “*better science*” by encouraging “the training and full participation of informed researchers with a variety of background experiences” (Lloyd 238), a position that she describes as “now-standard” and a rough outline of the position held by another influential feminist researcher into the sciences, Helen Longino.

In *Science as Social Knowledge: Values and Objectivity in Scientific Inquiry* (1990), Longino demonstrates an awareness of the problem of objectivity and subjectivity tackled by theorists above,<sup>9</sup> and though she is aware that there is no way to completely remove subjectivity, she asserts that this is not an insoluble situation. Though “value-laden science” can frighteningly imply “a science continually at the mercy of dominant interests” (Longino 15), “a new position has been developed as an alternative” to the purely objective or purely subjective modes: “scientific realism” (Longino 28). In this approach, the question of the reality of any given claim is not as important as its capacity for representation—that is, its ability to provide some useful predictive capacity. In this

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<sup>9</sup> Longino calls this a problem of scientific integrity and explores the question in more detail beginning on page 6 of *Science as Social Knowledge*.

way, “scientific realism” is more heavily aligned with the work of Kuhn than someone like Karl Popper, who is more interested in the difficulties of finding something “true.” Scientific realism does not describe a science that discovers “reality,” it focuses on creating a science that is instrumental—useful—and does so as efficiently as possible. To that end, the goal should be improving the diversity of the scientific community, “Because community values and assumptions determine whether a given bit of reasoning will pass or survive criticism and thus be acceptable” (Longino 81). The capacity for science to serve as a useful instrument increases dramatically when exposed to as many careful thinkers as possible, and this fact demands that the community be as expansive and inclusive as possible, while remaining rigorously devoted to working carefully with the scientific model.

Here at the end of the review of positions several things are now clear: there has been and continues to be a significant criticism of the masculinist biases in science; that criticism has been based on a relativist position and a claim for a significant influence of subjectivity despite claims of objectivity (the strong social constructivist position); the relativism of the claim has been tempered to a position that suggests better science will come from greater inclusion; masculinist science has always relied upon various rhetorics to support its claims. Holmes is, in his own fictional way, part of this rhetorical appeal, and thus represents a useful target for feminist critics seeking to demonstrate the error of his ways. But as the feminist criticisms of the detective’s skills in the presence of women demonstrate, there is an interesting tension created by the inclusion of women into the canon. Women complicate the easy assumptions of Holmes, and that complication mirrors the work of feminist scholars in science studies in both recognizing the value of



the work done by traditional scientific models while also seeking to expand their use. Thus, Laurie King's Mary Russell books, the first of which will be under scrutiny in the following section, play out the feminist critique of science by introducing a female equal for Holmes, in terms of both critique and homage. Russell does not do away with Holmes, and neither does feminist criticism do away with science; instead, a gradual refinement can be seen and the utility of reason—if not its absolute power—remains untouched.

### **The King Intervention**

Analysts interested in Laurie King's *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* have recognized the critical intent behind the book as a contemporary, feminist corrective for Holmes. Mary O'Donnell and Molly O'Donnell both realize the potential for "a modern historical novel" to "resolve some problems of Victorian ideology and its influence on detective fiction" and assert that in adding Mary Russell, a young woman with analytical talents equal to Holmes, to Holmes's world, "King has created a compelling and dynamic character based on a desire to improve the Victorian position on detecting as seen in Conan Doyle... 'intending to make Russell young, female, feminist, 20<sup>th</sup> Century, therefore much the superior of Sherlock Holmes'" (O'Donnell 13). Alana Preussner concurs and adds to the O'Donnells's reading, asserting that as a "direct assault" on the canon, "King's novels graft twenty-first century issues and hints of her American nationality onto Conan Doyle's well known English outlines, creating a built-in dialogue" (Preussner 93). Further, Preussner recognizes that King's strategy for critique depends upon "extending elements [of Holmes] that were there all along in the original...She

seizes, thus, on how a reading community has constructed Holmes” (Preussner 101).

These critics assert that the work King does is both reliant on the canonical Holmes and critical of him, but more importantly see this critique as fully intentional.

King has not been shy in admitting her problems with the canon, recognizing the subversive power of fiction in its ability “to offer different world views” and the desire to challenge the “boys’ stories” status of Conan Doyle’s Holmes (Cogdill 30). Asked where her character came from, King responds that

she had her beginnings in an upsurge of feminist sentiments triggered by a television production of one of the Holmes stories, the feeling that really, this much-vaunted man was only using skills possessed by any woman who has a child over the age of two, and many women who were not mothers at all. Call it common sense or feminine intuition, when it is found in a male it is considered extraordinary. And yes, she needs Holmes as her counterpart: he represents the height of Victorian, masculine thought, whereas she is the embodiment of modern feminism. Equal brains, different settings, different times. (James 50)

While perhaps somewhat hyperbolic, King effectively articulates her belief in the analytical power of women and the sense that their skills are quite often relegated to everyday life instead of extraordinary circumstances, echoing Langbauer’s critique of the dismissal of women’s work into the realm of the everyday. In her contribution to the Holmes genre, the addition of Mary Russell moves female analysis into the forefront of the text and confronts Holmes with his own error regarding expectations for women.

This critique represents a significant aspect of the text but should not be overstated; Jill Tedford Jones, in her “Depending on Memory: Intertextuality in Popular Fiction” (2002), recognizes that while “The previously sexist Holmes has to re-evaluate his prejudices” and “recognize his growing affection for this superior and unusual girl,” it is vital to Jones that “Sherlock is not diminished in King’s book” (Jones 82). In the novel, Holmes “simply continues to learn, this time about women,” a representation of the

character that allows him to remain fully tied to his canonical rational commitment. If Holmes is truly rational, the presence of evidence that invalidates his prior position—a highly intelligent young woman—should prompt him to change that position, and in King’s book this is exactly what occurs. Jones argues that this allows readers to “bring what they remember about Sherlock Holmes to bear on a new book and enjoy the revisionist aspect as well” (Jones 82). Readers may be forced to encounter a Holmes who gives up his misogynist tendencies and thus differs significantly from the canonical character, but at the same time the more central aspects of the character—his rationality, his analytical skill, his ability to solve particularly tricky mysteries—remain present. Certainly the character is not the same, but the similarities are such that Sherlockians are not likely to find much to disagree with in the novel or its sequels.

*The Beekeeper’s Apprentice*, only the first of a series currently totaling twelve books, is most useful for this study as its introduction of a main character separate from Holmes, Mary Russell, offers a potent initial critique of the detective. Opening with King’s claim that the text is a lightly edited transcript of a manuscript ostensibly written by Russell herself, the text moves from this Sherlockian game to Russell’s own introduction to the text, written as an elderly woman. In this, the narrator confesses that her “Holmes is not the Holmes of Watson” (xxi), and that the good doctor’s own perspective biased him toward Holmes’s actions just as her perspective does the same. Here in the opening pages King establishes that the author’s subjective position changes their descriptions and emphases, even if the target is presumed to be static—a strong tie to the situated knowledge of postmodern ontologists. After her introductory remarks, Russell proceeds to narrate the remainder of the book as a first-person reminiscence on

the events of her meeting with and studying under Holmes and on the first few cases they shared. Throughout the text, King manages to capture a vision of Holmes that matches the canonical detective thoroughly, despite some differences from Watson's version,<sup>10</sup> providing a convincing narrative for Holmes fans despite the inclusion of a non-canonical character.

The plot of *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* follows Mary Russell's first encounter with Holmes and the growth of mutual respect between the two, followed by a trio of mysteries solved by the duo and one longer investigation cum evasion in the second half of the book. During the first half, Russell learns from Holmes and demonstrates her own considerable analytical gifts, while in the background the First World War changes the social life of Britain, and alongside Holmes's education Russell attends Oxford. This section of the book establishes the relationship between Holmes and Russell and provides significant evidence for King's association with the popularization of scientific realism and feminist critiques of science. The remainder of the book follows the detectives' attempts to determine the identity of a master criminal targeting them, eventually revealing that this figure was behind one of the earlier cases the pair had worked and that this villain is a woman—Moriarty's daughter. This revelation establishes that feminist concern sits at the heart of the novel, with the criminal mastermind and new apprentice both female equals for Holmes, one seeking to destroy him and the other to save him. The text ends in a largely Holmes-supportive position, with Russell's quick thinking (and not-

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<sup>10</sup> King was inducted into the Baker Street Irregulars, a selective group of Holmes scholars and fans, following the book's publication, despite having, according to her, never having read the entire canon before beginning to write this novel. There are a few moments where things pop up, like Watson's statement that Holmes's addiction was not yet overcome until Russell arrived, that directly contradict canonical material, but the vast majority of the text is canon-friendly.

traditionally-feminine skill of throwing objects) providing Holmes the opportunity to save them both.

The remainder of this section will explore three aspects of King's novel that provide evidence for the nature of her critique of Holmes and its similarity to postmodern critiques of science. These will also demonstrate the middle ground that King seeks in her critique, which is a progressive revision of the science Holmes represents and not a radical critique. The first area of engagement is the interaction between Russell and Holmes and between Russell and other male authority figures. Though the amount of textual material featuring Russell/Holmes interactions is quite significant in itself, the changes she prompts in the detective's behavior are only truly visible as they interact with others. Part of these interactions includes the education Holmes provides his apprentice, but of equal importance is Russell's education outside Holmes. Her decision to attend Oxford and the areas of study she pursues—chemistry and theology—are significant departures in many ways from the Holmes model, establishing Russell as an independent thinker. Though it might be argued that the great detective would not respect a less independent-minded individual, Russell's decisions and her experiences provide support for the subjective approach to knowledge in much feminist epistemology. The final area of interest in this book is the pairing between Russell and the main antagonist, Professor Patricia Donleavy, daughter of Professor James Moriarty. The text establishes them metaphorically as competing queens, both in the conflict over their interest in Holmes (preserve versus eliminate) and in the larger metaphorical organization of beekeeping that organizes much of the text. Looking at these three sections will establish the relationship between the critique of Holmes provided by King and that of feminist

epistemologists' critique of science, showing the ways in which fictional critique helps promulgate and popularize changes in cultural narratives.

The first meeting between Holmes and Mary Russell provides the crucial foundation for the remainder of the pair's interactions, and King takes pains to establish that gender is at the center of the relationship over the course of the initial encounter, which lasts more than twenty pages. Nearly tripping over a tall figure in her travels across the downs, Russell and Holmes trade barbs until her analytical ability impresses the detective (she deduces that he is there to seek out a new hive of bees) (6), though critically she is not aware of his identity at first. This ignorance removes any aura of untouchability Holmes might have, and Russell's comments are particularly biting and incisive because of it. Responding to her observations, Holmes resembles "amazingly a captive eagle...perched in aloof splendour looking down the ridge of his nose at this lesser creature" before he responds that "It can think" (7). The gender neutral pronoun is certainly intended as an insult, treating Russell as a genderless object instead of a gendered subject. Considered with the scientific critique above in mind, this pronoun has the potential to imply a genderless observational compliment—that is, the subject is unbiased by gender and thus requires no gendered term. However, Holmes instead reveals his initial insulting intention after another short exchange, at which point, taking in Russell's masculine clothes and cap, he begins "Young man, I—" (8). Confronted with evidence of an individual's capacity for effective critical thought, Holmes assigns such a person a masculine gender, revealing his inherent biases regarding gender and intelligence.

Holmes's mistake is not, this time, an intentional insult to Russell's appearance, as her revelation that she is a young woman strikes him as greatly surprising and amusing. This is not because she herself is funny, but stems from the detective's enjoyment of his own failure to put the evidence of his senses to use. Having realized that the tall, slender man on the downs is in fact the great detective of Watson's stories, Russell is incensed at Holmes's mistake:

Fear aside, legend aside, [I] attacked with all the utter contempt only an adolescent can muster. With a surge of glee I seized the weapon he had placed in my hands and drew back for the coup de grâce. "'Young man'?" I repeated. "It's a damned good thing that you did retire, if that's all that remains of the great detective's mind!" (8)

Recognition of Holmes's error is an excellent tool with which to attack, but the nature of Russell's response here deserves exploration. The suggestion of age and retirement here as potential factors in his error bring bodily factors into the work he does, which implicitly brings embodiment into the canon as well. A weakened, elderly Holmes might make mistakes because of his current condition, but if conditions are a factor—if the body in which a mind is housed can make a difference—then the body must be included as an element in the original material as well. Even if it is elided in practice by the style of both the narrative and the science to which it aspires, Holmes's demonstration of rational thought is ever so subtly tied to a body.

Despite this connection, and despite the fact that Russell's gender is always present, Holmes—and Russell, to an extent—choose to ignore it. Noted as a recognition of familiarity, Russell informs the reader that "By our second meeting we had dropped 'Mr.' and 'Miss'" (27), referring to each other by surname alone. Familiarity is part of these dropped honorifics, but Holmes's discomfort is a substantial factor as well. In a

discussion of newly reduced social consequences for a bachelor and young woman spending time unchaperoned, Russell acknowledges that

from the first day he tended to treat me more as a lad than as a girl and seemed to solve any discomfort my sex might cause him by simply ignoring it; I was Russell, not some female, and if necessity required our spending time alone together, even spending the night without escort, then that is what we would do.  
(34)

Perhaps aided by a surname with a clear masculine referent, Holmes ignores any improprieties that his instruction of Russell might create, and the cultural shift toward a greater role for women in post-Victorian Britain smoothes over many of the problems that this might cause. Holmes's willful blindness toward Russell's gender remains problematic, reinstating the disembodiment that her initial criticism established. The detective wishes for the young woman to simply be a mind and does not have any interest in other factors—though he does respond to Russell's appearance as a pretty young woman with a “fit” in a briefly described memory (46). As the narrator, Russell acknowledges Holmes's disinterest in her gender as a relevant characteristic while also ensuring that the reader understands that she finds it quite pertinent. Discussions of continued learning through Mrs. Hudson's advice and the assistance of a local female schoolteacher, both of whom provide information about subjects in which Holmes displayed no interest or knowledge, suggest the importance of a broader frame of knowledge that incorporates subjective situation—a direct refutation of Holmes's limited studies as described by Watson in *A Study in Scarlet*.

Russell's continued insistence upon retaining a gendered perspective receives validation when she and Holmes begin to work together as partners. When on a kidnapping case in Wales, Russell's presence is questioned by the local police chief, who tells Holmes that “She... introduced herself. As your ‘assistant.’ I ask you, Mr. Holmes,



is this truly necessary?” (103). Though Russell herself does not immediately grasp the “multiple layers insinuated into his question” (103), Holmes takes issue with the chief’s implications—both professional and sexual—simply by asserting the fact of Russell’s recurring role as an assistant. Similar questions occur later in the novel, when Inspector Lestrade first meets Russell and does not believe Holmes’s statement that the young woman with him is his “assistant” (210), laughing at the supposed joke. This time Russell herself handles the criticism, demonstrating her bona fides with an impressive feat of deduction worthy of Holmes himself (211-212). These two moments, alongside Mycroft’s brief discomfort with the girl’s presence (177), indicate that Holmes’s desire to keep Russell gender neutral is doomed to failure, as while he may be capable of putting her gender aside in favor of focusing on her deductive skills, the rest of the world cannot. Russell is faced with the lingering Victorian assumptions so easily put aside by Holmes but which the remainder of the world is less capable of eliminating. Spaced out across the first half of the text, King makes these points a recurring feature of the narrative and is not comfortable simply allowing Holmes’s gender-blind strategy to operate throughout the remainder of the text. Instead, Russell and thus the reader as well must face the embodied reality of identity.

Capping this line of examination, in the final narrative arc of the text, in which Holmes and Russell find themselves assaulted by an unknown foe, Holmes is seriously injured by an explosion and, though he races to ensure that Russell does not meet the same fate, he fails to consider that Watson might also be at risk (180). Russell catches this error and contacts Dr. Watson in time for him to escape his house, but Holmes is mortified and cannot believe that he made the mistake. Shortly thereafter, Russell catches

a second slip made by Holmes, discovering a vital clue in a typed note that helps the pair of them understand their adversary more fully—and again, Holmes had missed it. Trying to find a way to soften the news, Russell considers several options:

Holmes, four days ago you were concussed and bleeding. Holmes, you've had less than a dozen hours' sleep in the last eighty. Holmes, you were exhausted and furious when you saw the note, and you would have called to mind the characteristic missing serif on the a and the off-centre, tipsy l and the high M, you'd have consciously remembered seeing them, if not today, then tomorrow, or the next day, Holmes. (229)

A version of the great detective that makes mistakes such as these treads upon thin ice in terms of faithfulness to the canon, but King's strategy here is not to create an invincible version of Conan Doyle's creation; instead she provides a slightly more realistic vision of the sleuth. Russell's suggestions for what might have caused the slips makes Holmes into a real person who cannot shrug off the effects of an explosion and needs some (if still admittedly little) sleep. The concerns she lists—brain damage, blood loss, sleep deprivation, fatigue, anger—are physical factors (save perhaps anger, though there is no time here for a discussion of the physiological bases of emotional reaction). She makes the case that Holmes is not simply a thinking machine, as Watson would have it, a mind that operates without worry for the body's circumstances, but a body and mind together—an embodied subject.

This claim occurs in the face of Holmes's own near-refusal to believe in his bodily limitations, as between his two mistakes he suggests that "there are times when the infirmities of the body may be used as a means of concentrating the mind" (181). Russell rejects this claim, reminding him of his mistake with Watson, and in putting this denial in her protagonist's mouth and following it up with a further mistake from a wounded Holmes, King endorses the position wholeheartedly. This position links beautifully with

the basic principle that Hume, Kuhn, and Haraway articulate in their own ways: observations are made by people, people make their observations from situated perspectives, and a central situation of all people is the particular body they happen to inhabit. In this update of Holmes, King specifically challenges Watson's description of Holmes as a "thinking machine" and places him into a body that can and does show weakness. Knowledge is still created and Holmes still makes incredible deductions, but he does so as a situated individual. Significantly, Russell is the character that makes these observations, as her own position as a figure whose situation as a young woman prompts those around her to assume she is either not a woman (Holmes) or that she is not capable of Holmes-level thought (the Welsh chief of police, Lestrade), preventing her from forgetting her own situation. While the very presence of women in the canon destabilize the narrative of scientific logic and reasoning that Holmes (and Conan Doyle) attempts to project, King's young woman instead resituates that knowledge in a possibly more acceptable frame, though one that is admittedly more subject to error than its prior rhetoric would suggest.

The construction of a critique of Holmes's scientific/empiricist observation continues in the nature of Russell's education. While she receives significant amounts of instruction from Holmes and much of the narrative focuses on this tutelage, she does not remain solely his student. Russell's particular educational path both expands upon Holmes's amateur basis and adds fields of study that Holmes would consider extraneous. Along with the above-mentioned Mrs. Hudson and schoolteacher, Russell attends Oxford University, having made plans to do so before meeting Holmes and following through on those plans in the novel. Within the first third of the text Russell enrolls in Oxford despite

its rather traditional view of women's education, deciding to study "chemistry and theology, the workings of the physical universe and the deepest stuff of the human mind" (40). This more formal education is quite different from that of Holmes, who, despite the variety of subjects in which he had significant knowledge, was not fit "for a degree in science or any other recognized portal which would give him an entrance into the learned world" (*New Annotated Novels* 32). Certainly Holmes relies upon chemistry in his profession, but his study of it is entirely focused on its use value for detection. Russell's decision to gain a degree instead of simply learning that which best suits detective work shifts the scientific—and thus epistemological—work done by Holmes away from the realm of the amateur toward that of the professional. This is a complicated situation, because Holmes clearly participates in the field of his creation, aware of the efforts of other criminologists like Alphonse Bertillion (*New Annotated Stories* 697) and the regular publisher of his own studies and findings.<sup>11</sup> These show that while Holmes is certainly an amateur crimefighter, he is by no means outside the professional criminology publication system.

Nevertheless, Russell's commitment to the university system places her more completely within the realm of the professional academic than Holmes, which stands as an implicit critique of the amateur system Holmes employed. While Conan Doyle's detective "invented" a profession for himself, Russell's actions show her belief in the educational system and its value; she places herself fully within a network of scholars instead of acting as an individual. Doing so fits Longino's scientific realism model for improved knowledge by expanding the number of people engaged in testing claims and

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<sup>11</sup> Some of Holmes's monographs are mentioned in *A Study in Scarlet* (an examination of cigar ashes), *The Sign of Four* (more tobacco ashes alongside footprints), *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (dating of documents), and "The Adventure of the Dancing Men" (ciphers and codes), among others.

theories within a field of inquiry. Holmes publishes and reads published material but acts primarily as an individual and not a member of a community, making Russell's choice (and King's portrayal) a strong if implicit critique. Equally relevant, Holmes disdains certain forms of knowledge, famously being uninterested in the Copernican model of the solar system (*New Annotated Novels* 32) because of its irrelevance to any possible detection needs. When informed of Russell's plan to study theology, he describes it as "a waste" (King 23), though he also acknowledges that it is "no worse than anything else," perhaps chalking her decision up to the vagaries of youthful indiscretion. In any case, selection of a criminologically useful field (chemistry) with a useless one (theology) seems to Holmes to be a needless waste of energy and time, but Russell describes her decision to pursue theological studies as a desire to know "the deepest stuff of the human mind," which could be useful in certain limited situations. In the scientific realism model, the greater breadth of information brought to bear on a field of study helps to improve the practical applicability of that model—and though it seems unlikely that divine mystery might be useful to chemical investigations, the source of inspiration for scientific experimentation is not tied exclusively to the field in which the work occurs. Longino explains a split between the "context of discovery" and "context of justification," recognizing that non-scientific thinking can prompt a moment of discovery that must then be justified empirically (Longino 64-65). When combined with a belief in the necessity of a wide range of opinions and experiences to best demonstrate the "acceptability" of a given scientific position—a centerpiece of scientific realism—Russell's decision to study theology begins to make more sense as a useful expansion of interest and awareness. It is not expected that studies in religion will directly lead to better chemistry, but instead that

a more “democratic” knowledge system will produce more effective science (Longino 214).

Russell’s first teacher, her father, turns out to be the most valuable instructor for her survival of the mystery’s twists and turns, as, prior to her arrival in Sussex, he had planned to introduce cricket to California and trained his daughter to be a bowler (84). Having believed that “all young ladies should be able to throw and run” (84), Mr. Russell provided his daughter an unexpected skill that allowed her to stop a fleeing criminal early in the text (84) and ultimately allowed her to disarm and defeat the mastermind hunting her and Holmes (335). The ability to throw with accuracy and power, a valuable skill for a bowler, is perhaps somewhat common among young women in the post-Title IX United States, but it clearly took Russell’s adversaries by surprise—along with Holmes, who calls it “Formidable” upon seeing it for the first time (84). Holmes himself had significant physical training, and perhaps Russell’s accurate arm serves as a parallel, save that her abilities are unexpected. With Holmes’s detective education, Oxford’s traditional university path, and her father’s belief in the value of well-practiced physical skill, King effectively undercuts Holmes’s suggestion that only the “applicable” knowledges are valuable. In *The Beekeeper’s Apprentice*, knowledge and investigation are not only necessarily embodied but, in its most useful form, are diverse and not always directly useful as well.

The third area in which King’s text produces critical work parallel to feminist epistemologists’ work is in the nature of the narrative’s primary antagonist: Moriarty’s daughter. Initially perceived as a foe as dangerous as the professor, Holmes utterly fails to consider the possibility that the mastermind might be a woman, shocked as he is by the

ways he is outmaneuvered. When first considering the existence of a new mastermind and discussing the issue with Mycroft and Russell, he uses the masculine pronoun exclusively (187-190), and it is not until the foe herself reveals her gender directly that the detective comes to realize the error of his assumption. Russell is equally guilty here, and despite her awareness of her own circumstance as a female thinker, she does not propose that a woman is behind the crimes until she finds the clues intentionally left by the antagonist. The text criticizes this failure of imagination, placing Russell and Holmes into great danger as a result of their assumption; they are forced to flee from England to avoid falling into the mastermind's clutches. The failure is particularly problematic due to the cover identity used by Miss Moriarty: Patricia Donleavy, Russell's mathematics tutor at Oxford. Having inside information on Russell and Holmes allowed Donleavy great latitude in planning her attacks and organizing her campaign of terror, and had Russell or Holmes considered the possibilities more carefully they might have been better able to fend off her assaults.

Donleavy knew they would be incapable of recognizing the possibility that their foe would be a woman, as evidenced by her handing Russell a clue to her identity on the night that the attacks began, asking her to research some of Moriarty's math work in base-eight notation (162). The same limitations that locked Holmes's imagination would be present in his student, and Donleavy's actions exploit the cultural expectations surrounding both cleverness and criminality—both masculine qualities. The clue she leaves Russell unlocks her identity, unlocking a code left behind at one of the crime scenes identifying the antagonist for the investigators, and it is telling that Donleavy left the clue for Russell to solve; even though she expects Russell to carry many of the same

flaws as her tutor, she expects the young woman to be the superior thinker. Upon meeting Holmes for the first time, Donleavy laments that “he was born trapped in a man’s body” (320), and she relishes the chance to show up the great detective and demonstrate the superiority of her female mind. Donleavy forces Holmes to call her by her first name and demands that he recount the narrative of the case based on his deductions, criticizing his work at every turn. And the master-stroke of her plan is a suicide note to be signed by Holmes before being murdered, in which he confesses that all of his efforts were fabrications and that he demonized a poor mathematics professor to further his own reputation. In essence, Donleavy wishes to unmake Holmes, to destroy the reason and order that he represents and to replace it with her own alternative criminal empire, resurrected from the ashes of Moriarty’s organization. Harkening back to “The Cardboard Box,” the antagonist of *The Beekeeper’s Apprentice* believes in a world in which reason is not an unqualified good and can be used to oppress and restrain as much as it might free or assist.

In putting this goal in the hands of a woman, and in providing another woman seeking to counter it, King’s book centers the fight for reason’s value and social role in women’s relationship to the production of knowledge. The science of Holmes is both under assault and defended by a woman. Though it ends rather predictably for a traditional mystery, with Holmes’s partner successfully helping him preserve social order and his belief in reason’s greater capacity for good, the dilemma presented by the text cleverly recreates the stakes of the broader question asked in feminist studies of science. The arch-criminal Donleavy, then, becomes an extreme version of the radical subjectivist/constructivist, making the world mean what she wishes it to mean and



imposing her own personal will on the world—a dark mirror of Holmes, quite similar to Browner in “The Cardboard Box.” Providing the other option, Russell is the more democratic, inclusive vision for science, expanding Holmes’s limited reason by her presence and helping him to avoid radical subjectivity himself. As a representative of scientific realism, Russell does not demand that the world become entirely knowable, but she does insist that a limited vision of the world will be far less instrumental than a more expansive model. And it is her progressive vision of science, one in which she can challenge some assumptions but does not resolve them all, that wins. In the end, Donleavy is caught unaware by the breadth of Russell’s physical education, surprised by the young woman’s ability to effectively throw a bottle of ink (335).

The limits of Russell’s position appear in the relative conservatism of the progressive approach. If the project of knowledge construction through reason and science cannot be advanced quickly through radical shifts in perspective (or if those radical shifts are not due to true knowledge of “reality” but instead paradigm shifts in scientific rhetoric and thinking), then only incremental change is likely, and that only with extraordinary care and attention. As noted above, Holmes’s system is not wholly changed, only modified slightly, and that slight modification is all that occurs to the mystery form in which King works. Later books in the series deepen the relationship between Russell and Holmes, and the pair is eventually married, despite the great difference in age. Critics find this problematic, asking whether “in choosing to marry Holmes...isn’t Russell falling victim to playing her role in a partial patriarchy?” (O’Donnell 16), and their concern is valid. The expectation for romance is implied by the cultural context of the novels, and in playing along with it King does not challenge that

aspect of the patriarchal system. This does not undo the work that she accomplishes in *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*, though it deserves recognition in demonstrating the difficulties of incremental criticism and improvement.

King's novel continues the postmodern project of improving the way knowledge is understood and represented, taking the initial radical critique and subsequent progressive movement and providing an intelligible, entertaining account of scientific realism's capacity to improve the functional capacity of scientific thinking and reason. Holmes functions as a cultural icon of science and reason, and by emphasizing his troubled relationship with women King is able to access concerns regarding that reason and dramatize them for her audience. Kuhn, Keller, Longino and Haraway all recognize the importance of rhetoric to science, and though Holmes stories do not produce science they perform it, legitimating the rhetoric underpinning the system. Working within this legitimizing framework, King's novel re-orientes the canonical rhetoric toward a late twentieth-century understanding of science, acknowledging critiques of Holmes and including them in the narrative, all while continuing to support a somewhat traditional view of the character. In both presenting these criticisms and working through them, King helps maintain the detective's relevance by walking a tightrope between homage and update.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ADVENTURE OF THE SOUTH ASIAN MIRRORS

Though Sherlock Holmes stories have traveled rather extensively throughout the world in translations of Conan Doyle's texts, the detective has largely remained a stubborn homebody—excepting of course the one moment in the canon when he is presumed dead and disappears for several years. Holmes rarely leaves London, and thus his worldwide popularity is both striking and intriguing, given the extensive breadth of imitations across the globe. In a short essay on Thai literature, Thak Chaloemtiarana explains that a Thai series called *Nithan Thong-in* published just after the turn of the twentieth century (1904-1905) “was a detective story inspired by Arthur Conan Doyle's *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* series...written by Prince Vajiravudh under the pseudonym Nai Kaew Nai Khwan” (93). This Thai version of Holmes is joined by other examples in Asia; shifting focus slightly north, Zhang Ping produces a fascinating exploration of the importance of the Holmes stories in Chinese translations at the end of the nineteenth century in his “Sherlock Holmes in China” (2005). Beginning with “Zhang Kun-de's translation of the British writer Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories in 1896” (Ping 106), Ping convincingly argues that because these stories were “the earliest and most popular detective stories” translated into Chinese, we should feel comfortable assuming “that the translation and diffusion of British detective fiction had a substantial influence on the gradual transformation of popular literature...which [was] subversive to the dominant judicial system in China” (Ping 113). To support his claim Ping provides

evidence showing that when first translated, the Holmes stories were treated as factual cases of British jurisprudence by Chinese publishers and their readers.

The spread of tales featuring Holmes and their rapid imitation was even faster in the British colonies. A publisher's circular from 1902 advertises the sale of Conan Doyle's "The Hound of the Baskervilles" "with illustrations" at the top of the "Longman's Colonial and Indian Library" offerings (*Publisher's Circular*), proof of the colonial English-reading public's access to books in the same year of their publication in England (*The Hound of the Baskervilles* was originally published in England in 1902 by Newnes, who sold the colonial rights to Longman). In fact, the colonial texts were often cheaper than those sold in Britain, were "for the most part...printed from the same plates as the home editions," and, for ease of transport to the colonies were "bound more cheaply in cloth or coloured paper" (Weedon 57). Alexis Weedon in *Victorian Publishing* further notes that while these texts were originally published in England and exported (Weedon 57), publishing houses eventually set up production facilities in India, "and it was Macmillan who first opened a branch there, followed in 1906 by Longman" (Weedon 32). Publishers found that locating publishing houses directly in the colonies eased the burden of shipping texts around the world, and the owners did not want to miss the revenue provided by readers throughout the empire. Though easy access to recently printed books allowed colonial audiences to enjoy a roughly simultaneous experience with readers in Britain in the twentieth century, Suchitra Mathur clarifies that Holmes was also "present in public libraries since the 1890s" and asserts that beginning with these early texts the detective "has remained immortal in India, a constant object of admiring consumption, imitation, and adaptation" (Mathur 88). Not only did British-

controlled India have easy access to the fiction of Conan Doyle but the knight's detective received significant attention from the reading (and writing) public, both of which had a significant influence on fiction in South Asia.

The presence of Sherlock Holmes in libraries and booksellers' stalls provided opportunity and inspiration for local authors to begin translating and reinventing the detective. Exploring a subset of detective fiction translation in India, Markus Daeschel notes that the detective was translated into Urdu as early as 1914 if not before (Daeschel 22). Further, the "Translations of Sherlock Holmes were advertised by their Lahori publishers as introductory reading for all those who wanted to join the colonial police service" (Daeschel 27), marking once again the detective's role in the construction of an empirical reality for Britain and its subjects. Though fascinating, Daeschel's work constrains itself to Urdu translation, a necessary limitation given the variety of languages and cultures in South Asia. Slightly broader is Francesca Orsini's "Detective Novels: A Commercial Genre in Nineteenth-century North India" (2004), an invaluable resource for a historical investigation of Holmes in South Asia. She provides an absorbing history of the form (though she too limits herself, here to a single region), clarifying that the translations in north India began when the detective stories were "translated from English to Bengali and then from Bengali into other Indian languages at the end of the nineteenth century" (Orsini 436). These translations, while sometimes sporting trappings that failed to match the content of the text, opened the door for further modification of Conan Doyle's detective. Reframed by local language, Sherlock Holmes grew more accessible to Indian audiences—surely contributing to his remaining "immortal in India".

Aware of the popularity of the canonical Holmes and comfortable with the structure of those tales, a number of South Asian writers produced their own versions of the character, among them Panchkauri De, whose Govindram appeared in the late nineteenth century. Orsini writes that in turning “Sherlock Holmes into Govindram and Watson into Dr Bose” that De was following in others footsteps, having “done to the Bengali detective novel what Gahmari and other detective writers were doing to the Hindi one: naturalizing foreign characters and settings while maintaining the glamour of the detective’s fast life and smart brains” (Orsini 446). Mathur also contributes to the list of indigenous authors reframing Holmes and argues that Satyajit Ray’s Feluda series, primarily a set of novels from 1965 to 1996 but also a number of movies from 1974 to a planned reboot in 2014, is essentially an Indian Holmes—but one that appears “more a form of ‘writing back’ rather than mimicry...[providing a] direct challenge to colonial authority through the oppositional assertion of indigenous native knowledges and perspectives” (Mathur 98). The question of these texts’ relationship to British materials anticipates the postcolonial discussion of this chapter, and Mathur’s sense that Ray asserts the primacy of local knowledges is quite valuable. Other authors, such as Swapan Kumar, Devan, Vaduvor Duraiswamy Iyengar, and Tamil Vanan (Chambers 33), joined Ray in these efforts; Daeschel asserts that

There is clear evidence that [detective fiction] acquired a strong presence in Hindi, Indian English, Bengali and Urdu with a great likelihood of a similar state of affairs existing in the other main languages of the subcontinent. (Daeschel 21)

These authors merge the detective form with more traditional narrative strategies, making “the ‘new’ intelligible for [themselves] and for others, and in the process participated in the recomposition of identities that was the hallmark of colonial modernity” (Orsini 477).

Orsini's reading of these authors' efforts again pushes toward postcolonial theory, referencing as it does both questions of identity and "colonial modernity." Though many of these authors were able to bring detective fiction in line with other cultural norms (and Orsini's full article effectively demonstrates this work), the very act of doing so suggests a merging of cultural values that has persisted long past the end of active colonial programs.<sup>1</sup>

The negotiation of cultural contact wherein one culture was once lauded as superior to another is a fair beginning point from which to understand the postcolonial perspective. In the case of India, the long presence of a British authority and the imposition of British culture onto the colonized peoples of India has resulted in a situation in which Indian authors often face the incredible difficulty of managing the effects of this cultural imposition alongside a variety of other, often more local, intercultural maneuverings. Orsini, Daeschel and Mathur explore some of these cultural exchanges and their results, exploring the variety of ways in which local authors incorporated foreign genres (like the detective story) and narrative strategies, and though they often use terms and ideas generated through postcolonial theory to help understand these authors' texts, only Mathur focuses on the postcolonial situation (focusing on Ray's Feluda, whose first appearance occurred long after the departure of Britain). These texts help to establish that Holmes was a major influence on Indian authors and perhaps even the primary font for detective stories in South Asia, and this chapter will rely on that

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<sup>1</sup> This is a simplification in many ways, as a variety of colonial activities have continued throughout the twentieth century. Though the presence of imperial authorities asserting legal control over a colony is less common it is not entirely absent and has taken other forms. This chapter focuses primarily on South Asia, where British control of the majority of the territory ended in the middle of the twentieth century, yet their cultural influence continues to reverberate.

concept as it looks at a pair of immediately postcolonial authors, Partha Basu and Jamyang Norbu, and their postcolonial treatment of Sherlock Holmes.

One of the pre-eminent postcolonial theorists, Homi Bhaba, in his *The Location of Culture* (1991) reads the act of writing in the postcolonial mode as an effort that defies any need for “the ‘right’ to signify from the periphery of authorized power” (Bhaba 3). In its defiance of this requirement, “those who are ‘in the minority’”—those facing the external valuations of imperial authority—can rewrite the cultural tradition of the colonizers “through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness” inherent in their own histories (Bhaba 3). Bhaba does not suggest that every product of a once colonized people is actively engaging with this dilemma, but his comments suggest that the postcolonial is a perspective as much as a deliberate act, and that careful examination of texts produced “from the periphery of authorized power,” from the margins and interstices, “introduces other, incommensurable temporalities into the invention of tradition” (Bhaba 3); these texts destabilize the unified narrative of progress and control maintained by the colonizers. Critically, this destabilization, what Bhaba calls “borderline engagements of cultural difference,” is not a unified action, and

may as often be consensual as conflictual; [these critical texts] may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress. (Bhaba 3)

His sense of the variety of responses to “tradition” is extraordinarily valuable, as there is no single way for a particular marginalized people—much less the variety of peoples in South Asia—to react to or against the influence of a colonizing nation. As the remainder of this chapter will hopefully demonstrate, when looking specifically at the case of Sherlock Holmes, Indian author Partha Basu takes a “writing back” approach, while



Jamyang Norbu, a Tibetan exile living in India, relies upon a far more positive view of the character. Both authors actively respond to the canonical detective's adventures from a once colonized nation, and both demonstrate extensive familiarity with Conan Doyle's original texts; however, each reads the detective differently.

This chapter will investigate Basu's *The Curious Case of 221B* and Norbu's *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* alongside sketching out Holmes's relationship to the British imperial project. In doing so it will argue that although Basu's more critical presentation of the detective reveals a crucial flaw within the Holmes genre that echoes the imperial project, Norbu's less critical invocation of the sleuth relies on his nationalist rhetoric to engage audiences with the author's politics. Though each text is interesting in its own way, Norbu's book illustrates the possibility that a canonical Holmes can retain significant importance for postcolonial authors, that the detective's role as a protector of the British nation can be mobilized for other nations—most importantly, Norbu's Tibet. In this way, despite significant criticism directed at Holmes for his support of empire and imperialist logics, Conan Doyle's detective carries characteristics and values that can be activated for post-colonial projects, and the persistence of Holmes in the face of such significant concerns seems unaffected. This chapter is thus broken into two halves, each featuring two sections. In the first half, Basu's postcolonial critique of the detective appears, in which Holmes's relationship with Watson is read through a postcolonial lens and found to be an interesting mirror for the dominant/subordinate cultural organization in colonial situations. Basu critiques not only the treatment of Watson but also the canonical texts's presentation of women, echoing the previous chapter, and places the opportunity to reveal these critiques in the hands of a young Indian man. A discussion of

the various canonical references to the colonies and the British imperial project concludes the first half of this chapter, placed alongside a critical assessment of Sherlock Holmes's role as a protector of Britain from any distortions to its character that colonial possessions might induce. This second section clarifies the detective's support of imperialism, linking Conan Doyle's work with that of Rudyard Kipling (particularly *Kim*, 1901) in terms of their being a pair of information-based guardians of and apologists for the logic of imperialism.

The second half of this chapter shifts focus to explore Jamyang Norbu's *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, recognizing that its status as a text written from within a culture in exile marks it as particularly interesting for postcolonial readings. Norbu's position, situated as he is as a representative of one culture living in another, mirrors the Tibetan peoples' situation, as they attempt to retain their own culture while living under Chinese authority. Within this context, Norbu's novel mobilizes the very empirical, single-minded logic that Basu critiques, using a tightly canonical Holmes to support his text's presentation of Tibet as a nation. This work effectively uses a fictional character and his attendant characteristics—particularly a nationalist belief and support—to help convince readers of the rightness of Tibetan sovereignty. Norbu therefore uses the nation-supporting attribute of Sherlock Holmes, his British identity and work to preserve his home island's culture against encroaching beliefs and practices, while separating the character from his colonialist position. This latter occurs through the distinction made in the text's canonical presentation of Holmes from the revisionary treatment of Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, a Bengali character in Kipling's *Kim* who is reworked rather dramatically. *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* presents a fascinating strategic

deployment of Sherlock Holmes, retaining a great respect for the character (as King does with her pastiche) while providing a somewhat more limited critique of the character—a tangential critique, perhaps, given its use of Mookerjee. The postcolonial efforts of Basu and Norbu provide a pair of separate approaches, perhaps the “consensual and conflictual,” to return to Bhaba, in each of their projects. Here again, Holmes persists and, though criticized, retains significant value for certain postcolonial projects.

### **A Weakened Holmes**

Partha Basu’s *The Curious Case of 221B: The Secret Notebooks of John H Watson, MD* (2009) opens as many other Holmes pastiches begin: with the discovery of files kept by Doctor Watson after his death. Green and Watt’s *Alternative Sherlock Holmes* devotes a significant amount of time to this particular subgenre of Holmes narratives, placing the discovery of lost or unpublished narratives alongside texts that attempt to complete the canon by telling the tales mentioned by Watson in passing but never published (3-76). In this way, Basu’s novel is not new, but its relationship to the detective is somewhat different from previously published narratives, as Basu writes as a postcolonial author in India and his text works within established postcolonial revisionist narratives. The text is structured around the discovery of three separate letters, each of which includes the “real” version of several canonical tales and/or an expansion or parallel narrative for the texts. Crucially, the discoverer is a young Indian man, Jit, whose parents died near Calcutta during the buildup to the South Asian war of independence in 1971, wherein East Pakistan broke away from Pakistan and formed the nation of Bangladesh. Jit discovers the first two of Watson’s letters as he cleans out his parents’ house to prepare it for sale, situating the discovery of these narratives in the continuing

legacy of the British occupation of India. The relationship between these letters, sent to Jit's parents by Watson himself, and the ongoing crisis is never explicitly detailed, but Holmes's friend provides a clue to it when, in his first letter, he makes the reader aware that "to manifest the uniqueness of my friend, I have had to routinely present myself in a suitably unflattering light—to be the perfect foil and sometimes even the Fool" (Basu 6). This early claim invites the reader to reconsider the importance of Watson to the stories, suggesting that the good doctor was more than a simple observer and occasional assistant—in these tales, the subordinate figures become the equals and sometime superiors of the canonically dominant Holmes.

Considered within the postcolonial context of the novel, Watson's plan to present "some untoward truths about the man [Holmes] and his exploits" despite having been "obliged to camouflage" them for "the public interest" (Basu 6) enacts a reversal of roles from the canon that depicts a cultural shift away from British dominance. When Jit realizes that the doctor's notebooks show "Holmes, an iconic, almost mythical person, being shown up as conceited, clueless and often error-prone by those he cruelly mocked for their intellectual failings" (Basu 129), he does not only describe the challenge to Holmesian tradition but also evokes a dismissal of the British treatment of colonial India. As the great detective used Watson and acknowledged his limited abilities in patronizing fashion, a parallel dominant/subordinate relationship can be read onto the colonial relationship between Britain and India. The mythical imperial Britain, colonizer and bringer of civilization to the four corners of the world, did so under an aegis of development and education, laboring under the belief that the people they colonized needed correctives for their "intellectual failings." In this they were certainly mistaken,

and the narrative used to justify their actions has been exploded rather conclusively; Watson's recharacterization of Holmes echoes that dismissal.

The secret notebooks lay out Holmes's flaws in more detail, dovetailing with the feminist critique of the detective. In three of the reconstructed narratives, women have a much more prominent role than that provided for them in the canonical tales. Though the first revised tale focuses more on Holmes's failure to fully understand the events of "A Scandal in Bohemia" and the multi-layered strategy pursued by the king of Bohemia, the second revision involves the clever women behind the events of "The Illustrious Client." In place of the canonical women who are controlled and bullied by the story's villain, Basu's reconstruction presents the pair, Violet de Merville and Kitty Winter, as clever protagonists who actively use Holmes's intervention to escape their situation. The fourth modified narrative focuses on "The Speckled Band" and gives a voice to the woman murdered before the tale began through a diary sent to Watson; the surviving woman who hires Holmes, Helen Stonor, is also suspected by Watson of being the true agent behind the death of her tormentor. Most interestingly, the third alteration to the canon, amending "The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax," contains the transcript of a lengthy dialogue between Watson and the titular Lady, who berates Holmes for failing to see her true danger. After providing a lengthy list of the clues the detective missed in his search for her, Carfax castigates Holmes thoroughly: "Your friend is so full of himself that he finds everyone else empty. The habit of thinking in this fashion is fraught with grave risk" (Basu 120). Alongside the narrative assistance provided to Watson by Mrs. Hudson's daughter Emma, Basu's modification of the canonical tales greatly improves the roles given to women, who are largely subordinate figures in the originals and, as the

previous chapter explores, regularly denigrated by Holmes. From both feminist and postcolonialist points of view, Basu's text critiques Conan Doyle's tales by confronting their assumptions directly and thereby allowing Holmes to hang himself with his own rope.

The three revisions noted above comprise less than half of the modifications provided by *The Curious Case of 221B*, and Basu shifts away from critical alteration to focus on racism, hoaxes and detective work done by Watson himself—and, it should be noted, Holmes comes out rather well in certain stories. Basu revises the first encounter between Holmes and Watson, with Holmes *not* claiming that the doctor had been to Afghanistan because he had insufficient evidence. In the revised version, Holmes notes that he would not have selected Afghanistan because of the relative brevity of British involvement there, and that many other options were more likely (17-18). In this case, and in others throughout the revisions, Holmes makes less impressive deductions that are grounded far more in reality and is generally more fallible, but Watson notes that he did not want to present this version of the detective. He asserts that for his readers, “it was axiomatic that the world's greatest sleuth could not possess feet of clay” (18), and so the doctor suppressed the errors and played up the action and shocking feats of reasoning to play to that audience. The narrator wonders at this, concluding after having read the revised narratives that “the secret diaries were not just a retelling of those half a dozen or more cases,” they were “something more than that”:

Dr Watson had to be very cautious because he was having to manage a heroic presence and a huge following. So, he carefully wrote down the truth and then suppressed it, letting the original versions stand. These two contrary actions tell us a lot, about Holmes, about Dr Watson, and about their relationship. (276-277)

Jit attempts to work through the consequences of this contradiction but has difficulty doing so, eventually concluding that Watson left the “true” narratives unpublished because he could not hurt his friend or the audience to whom he owed much of his success, but that he also left them so that a trusted future agent might decide whether they should be published or not. Jit’s family is that agent, and Jit decides to publish them, ostensibly resulting in the book itself. However, Jit’s reading of the situation is perhaps not as nuanced as possible.

From a postcolonial standpoint, a subordinate Watson unwilling to damage the reputation of his superior provides interesting commentary on the colonial relationship; in Basu’s text much of Holmes’s reputation rests on his subordinate’s readiness to participate in both the (undeserved) lauding of the detective’s skill and the (equally undeserved) denigration of the recorder’s capabilities. While Holmes depended on Watson’s willing modifications to maintain his reputation, as the subordinate partner Watson equally depended upon Holmes for his position. Read as a colonial parallel, Basu’s text suggests both that public acceptance of subordination is a necessary condition for the maintenance of subjugating power and that resistance can occur in the documentation of errors and flaws in the dominant authority, even if that resistance is delayed. When Watson leaves his notebooks behind, secret though they may be, they provide a way for contemporary readers to see the faults running throughout the reputation of Holmes and thus also a fundamental failure of the colonial power relationship. Seen in this light, Basu’s novel works as a postcolonial writing back, a challenge to the traditional narratives provided to support colonial activities, though this functions more in a rhetorical mode than as a critique of an explicitly imperial text.

This writing back bears striking similarities to texts like Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), which, in revisiting Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), took a text without a great deal of explicit colonial content and expanded the limited and/or implicit material, producing a criticism of the imperial context's power dynamics. Basu's novel does much the same thing, reading in the Holmes/Watson dynamic a variation on the imperial Britain/India dyad, despite the absence of any such suggestion in the original stories. The text's treatment of this relationship as a colonial one is entirely a fiction made up by Basu, but its reframing of the pair's association clearly fits a postcolonial reorganization of the canon. The suggestion that Watson is representative of the Indian position is somewhat problematic, given his middle-class English background, but Basu does not worry much over this; the good doctor's put-upon existence as a regularly mocked sidekick in the canon receives regular mention by both Jit and Watson, and the text highlights Watson's non-cultural advantages in the face of these criticisms to point out the ease with which they are overlooked, overlooking at the same time the benefits of his class and birthplace. Giving the notebooks to an Indian family to determine their fate mitigates this concern to an extent, as does the existence of Emma, Watson's daughter with his wife, Mrs. Hudson. As a secondary narrator of the *Secret Notebooks*, Emma provides a clearer subordinate figure through whom the alteration in dominance can appear more easily. Watson places his "truths" in the hands of those that his Empire would have perceived as subordinate, asking them to take command over the narrative; while we might mistrust the power relationship implied there (Watson having the authority to give them power), the sense that Emma and Jit are in control is intended.



Basu is not the only author to use the detective to make a postcolonial critique. Stef Craps and Gert Buelens recognize this in their “Traumatic Mirrorings: Holocaust and Colonial Trauma in Michael Chabon’s *The Final Solution*,” finding in Chabon’s book a clever use of language to produce continuities between Holocaust and colonial logics. Chabon’s book relates the story of a retired beekeeper—an unnamed but unmistakable Holmes—consulting on a case involving a German-Jewish refugee boy in 1944 England and failing to understand the clues that point at evidence of the Holocaust. Craps and Buelens read this failure as “an elegy for the detective story, a mournful reflection on the loss of the rational and moral order of the world” (Craps 572). Further, the pair convincingly argue that “the novella belongs to the genre of postcolonial trauma narrative just as much...as it is a novelistic reflection on the Holocaust,” a link “conveyed rather strikingly at the rhetorical level, particularly through the use of similes and metaphors” (Craps 573). The article includes a set of carefully explored examples of these figures that makes their claim plausible,<sup>2</sup> marking Chabon’s text as another use of Conan Doyle’s detective to make a postcolonial critique. As with Basu’s novel, this occurs despite the relatively limited mention of empire in the Conan Doyle stories and their almost exclusively English setting.

Basu and Chabon revise and revitalize the original, imperialist narratives of the canon with new perspectives and material that is critical of the original but relies upon knowledge of those narratives to build its critique. Their critique functions in large measure because, as Nels Pearson and Marc Singer note in their *Detective Fiction in a Postcolonial and Transnational World* (2009),

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<sup>2</sup> There are a number of these, including the a car that is “difficult to govern” called an “Imperia” and the fact that a parrot central to the plot is referred to primarily as “the African grey”, which Craps and Buelens assert demonstrates the creature’s colonized status (574).

from its inception, the detective genre has been intrinsically engaged with epistemological formations that are not simply those of “society” in the abstract—that is, dominant culture groups and their hegemonic discourse—but those produced in encounters between nations, between races and cultures, and especially between imperial powers and their colonial territories. (Pearson 3)

In Basu’s novel, Watson’s revelations undercut the epistemological bases for Holmes’s deductions and mystery resolutions, bases that are made evident in his treatment of Watson as a foolish if good-hearted sidekick and his unwillingness to accept the possibility that women could be intelligent agents. Basu recognizes the power of the discourse embodied by Holmes in his representation of the dominant culture group and, presenting it again for readers to see from a different angle, challenges any easy belief in the detective’s powers and by extension his cultural assumptions. The novel’s work mirrors Brian McHale’s previously presented claims through their shift in “dominant”; the canon contains much of the material here but focuses the reader on the power of Holmes as an agent of resolution, while Basu presents the material with a different focus.

In this way, postcolonial critiques can draw upon and expand McHale’s reading of the postmodern shift by looking at questions and concerns not present in McHale’s exploration—particularly those surrounding the legacy of colonialism and its empiricist dogma. Concurrently, an examination of detective fiction in this context can provide further insights into the current state of postcolonial efforts, recognizing trends and interests in one subset of the field that might be found in others. In their exploration of postcolonial detective literature, Pearson and Singer recognize a shift in the “dominant” of studies into detective-centered texts, in which there is a clear move away from the structural concerns of the late twentieth century (exemplified by Todorov, Moretti, and Cawelti, among others) toward a “fundamentally different argument about how the genre

engages structures of knowledge, especially those ‘external’ to the text” (Pearson 2). In place of Moretti’s claim for the stabilizing cultural power of the detective story—what Christine Matzke and Susanne Muehleisen call the high “moralizing potential” of crime fiction (Matzke 14)—the contemporary detective text engages in a “dynamic interplay between the modern and the postmodern, the material and the metaphysical, the investigation of truth and of investigation itself, that local understanding within a postcolonial and transnational world demands” (Pearson 12). Studies of these texts reflect this growing diversity—and the contradictions it often entails—in their movement away from a singular sense of what the genre provides. While Matzke and Muehleisen recognize that traditional concerns “are still of central interest to the exploration of postcolonial detective novels—as in questions of authority and social power—crime fiction has long proved that it has more to offer” (Matzke 14). Instead of relegating the detective to the role of cultural supporter or protector, these investigations into contemporary examples of the genre have found that “Detective fiction is, of necessity, about the Other” (Kim 1), as Julie H. Kim stresses in the opening of her *Race and Religion in the Postcolonial British Detective Story* (2005). And if this Other is, in traditional detective fiction and certainly the Holmes canon, relegated to the background or disciplined out of existence, contemporary texts and explorations recognize this disappearance and bring it to the forefront.

This is precisely what Basu does in *The Curious Case of 221B*, wherein marginal figures receive a more prominent position. The author forces readers to acknowledge the possibility of questions left outside the original narratives and thereby shifts the readers’ focus away from assumptions of a complete worldview presented by Conan Doyle’s great

detective toward the gaps and aporias that exist in the canon. *The Curious Case of 221B* is a resistant text, one that challenges the canon, but as such it relies upon a well-trodden path of resistance; the work of writing back to colonialist texts—even those that are not entirely and explicitly so—reaches back at least as far as Rhys’s book and certainly even further. While recognizing the value of such a text, Matzke and Muehleisen also wonder what else the postcolonial point of view might do in the introduction to their collection of essays: “What, then, does the ‘postcolonial’ bring to the genre of crime fiction apart from well-known discourses of ‘resistance’, ‘subversion’ and ‘ethnicity’, all of which are undoubtedly valid and form an important part of the debate?” (Matzke 17). Their concern is clearly not that resistance like Basu’s is irrelevant, but that it is a tried-and-true strategy that contributes to the debate in a local way. *The Curious Case of 221B* is a functional critique of Holmes’s relationship to Watson as an echo of the imperial relationship under which they work, and it provides a useful corrective for perceptions that Holmes is largely uninterested in and/or disconnected from the efforts of the British Empire. The work it does is useful and valuable, particularly with respect to public perceptions of the detective and his role, but its relevance to the continuing concerns of colonialism is less clear. As Matzke and Muehleisen indicate, there are a number of other possible strategies and tactics available for postcolonial authors, many of which appear in the mystery or crime genre, and further investigation into these possibilities remains valuable.

For this project, the almost completely undiluted criticism of Holmes performed by Basu points toward a separate thread of engagement with the detective that is closer to parody than careful employment of Holmes for some other end. In the previous chapter, Laurie King’s *The Beekeeper’s Apprentice* recognized some of the detective’s canonical

failings but included the detective's talents while doing so; King was not so much interested in damning Holmes as recuperating him and using him as a platform from which to promote a more complete feminist understanding of science and knowledge. The work done by Basu, in contrast, does not bring the detective to an understanding of his failures and limitations and thus provides a competing view of Conan Doyle's narratives that, while certainly participating in discussions of Holmes's value and historical importance, provides a relatively simple negation of the sleuth's continuing relevance. Taking a different path, Jamyang Norbu's *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, also written in South Asia but from the perspective of a displaced Tibetan author, relies upon the very thing that Basu so effectively undermines: the detective's role as a guardian of the nation. The latter parts of this chapter will explore Norbu's strategy, which recognizes the value of the direct critique as performed by Basu but also finds an effective way to employ the nationalist and perhaps even conservative role of Holmes. However, before an in-depth discussion of Norbu's book can begin, Sherlock Holmes's role as a guardian of England and preserver, perhaps even producer, of the nation and empire must be understood.

### **The Colonial Connection**

Partha Basu's reconstruction of Conan Doyle's canonical work may seem somewhat unlikely or irrelevant given the conventional image of Sherlock Holmes: stalking criminals through fog-wreathed London streets, gas streetlights and lamps of a hackney coach failing to illuminate the dark shadows of nearby alleys. Holmes does not generally have a strong relationship with Britain's imperial interests in the popular imagination, and though Basu's reworking of the detective follows Rhys's path in

expanding the import of a minor detail as a marker of colonialism, it should be noted that the popular conception of the detective elides significant imperial content in the canon.

This is not surprising news to scholars of Conan Doyle or his most famous creation, and this section will provide a breakdown of what a detective separated from the colonies and operating exclusively in the metropolitan center of the empire does in its service.

Beginning with a discussion of the most explicit material, from Conan Doyle's own thoughts on the imperial project and his Irish background to the canonical narratives with the greatest link to colonial activity, this segment will move into discussions of the more abstract connections between the detective and imperialism and links between the detective and the spy as agents of the nation, building a bridge between Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901) and Holmes. The critics cited here will help to establish the efficacy of Holmes as a symbol and protector of the British Empire and thus of nationalism more broadly.

Though Sherlock Holmes displays little interest in the peculiarities and difficulties of Britain's colonial efforts, his actions and beliefs are supportive of the project more generally. Discussed in the previous chapter, Joseph Kestner's *Sherlock's Men* links Holmes's reason with Victorian masculinity while also establishing the colonial ramifications of such a belief. He asserts that by having Watson injured at the battle of Maiwand, "one of the worst defeats of the imperial army during the [nineteenth] century" (Kestner 7), the Holmes stories become about recovery from imperial injury—and that this is as intentional as the decision to use Holmes as a model for the masculine ideal. Kestner demonstrates this by quoting Conan Doyle's racist belief in "the future supremacy of the English-speaking races" (Kestner 8) and that "every Saxon [including

Americans] will be united under one form of government. Home rule, with a centre of authority, and the Anglo-Saxon will swing the sword of justice over the whole world” (Kestner 8). With these claims, and with the subsequent discussion of Conan Doyle’s fear of Germanic competition, Kestner effectively demonstrates that the author had significant colonial concerns impinging upon his writing of Holmes, a position easily backed up by further investigation into Conan Doyle’s life and publications. The creator of Sherlock Holmes traveled to South Africa and published an account of his time there, *The Great Boer War* (1900), during “the great hiatus” in which he wrote no Holmes text, and his historical account of this war is heavily biased in support of British imperial activity, though it includes some criticisms of decisions made during the war. His letters are filled with statements supportive of the empire, and there could be no more loyal servant of the crown’s interests abroad.

Despite these statements and beliefs, Conan Doyle came from an Irish background and had a relatively troubled relationship with the cause of Irish nationalism. Described fully in Catherine Wynne’s *The Colonial Conan Doyle: British Imperialism, Irish Nationalism, and the Gothic*, Conan Doyle’s beliefs were not entirely monolithic, and Wynne teases out tensions in his embrace of imperial Britain through his depiction of Irish nationalists in the canonical Holmes tales.<sup>3</sup> For Wynne, though Conan Doyle sought to present himself as “more English than the English themselves,” his Irish heritage “positioned him as an outsider” (Wynne 5). This contradiction bled into the author’s work in the form of striking Gothic components to his narratives:

His preoccupations with colonialism are demonstrated in recurring obsessions with land, mind, racial identity, and sexuality. Refracted, however, through an

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<sup>3</sup> According to Wynne, *The Valley of Fear* is the only Holmes story with a direct reference to Irish nationalist causes, but other non-Holmes texts include some discussion of Irish concern.

imperial prism, a tense and ambivalent response to such issues emerges in Gothically inflected narratives. (Wynne 13)

These Gothic inflections, from empty, haunted landscapes and family secrets to dark and often sexually-charged motivations, become markers of subconscious anxiety that threaten to overwhelm the largely successful actions of Holmes and Conan Doyle's other protagonists. Thus, despite both the limited number of references to imperial concerns in the Holmes canon and the author's public support of colonial expansion, the anxieties of empire still trouble Conan Doyle and appear in his texts regardless.

Before turning to critical examinations of the homebound detective's importance for imperial culture, some of the tangible moments of colonial contact in the canon require attention. Of the short stories, many involve a return from the colonies—most famously “The Adventure of the Speckled Band,” in which the villain, Dr. Grimesby Roylott, married into a rich family while in India and there decided to no longer attempt to build up his practice. Instead, he decided to murder the daughters of his wife and secure the fortune for himself, surrounding his estate with supposedly “Indian” creatures such as baboons and cheetahs (neither of which are from India) and using as his murder weapon a (fictional) “swamp adder...the deadliest snake in India” (*New Annotated Stories* 256-257). Zoological inconsistencies aside, Roylott's association with India is clear, and he represents a host of other figures from the canon—both villain and not—who have returned from the colonies and were changed by the experience. Such characters are a regular part of the canon, and Conan Doyle uses them for a variety of roles during Holmes's cases. The single most sustained colonial reference in the canonical tales appears in the second novel, *The Sign of Four* (1890), in which a hunt for an Indian treasure during the Indian Rebellion of 1857, named by Britons at the time and



in the story “the Indian Mutiny,” has made its way to Britain. The links between Holmes and the colonies are more thoroughgoing in this text and have received significant attention from scholars interested in imperial British fiction.

In this novel, published just before Conan Doyle began his far more famous short story sequence, Holmes and Watson are hired by Mary Morstan, a future wife of Dr. Watson, to investigate the death of her father, Captain Arthur Morstan, and the regular parcels she has been receiving since his death, each of which contains a single Indian pearl. After lengthy investigation, Holmes discovers that Morstan’s death occurred due to a weak heart and an argument over Indian treasure. Further, the search for the treasure has killed at least one other, and the detective determines that the culprit, Jonathan Small, is working with an Andaman islander, Tonga, to track down those who had reneged on a secret deal to split the wealth. Tonga, whose home islands are just to the west of mainland India, uses poison to kill one other member of the conspiracy, and between the poison and the small footprint he left behind, Holmes is able to prepare for and capture Tonga and Small. The discovery of the treasure and the opportunity for spiriting it out of the country occur during the mutiny, however, Small has lost a leg due to an accident with a crocodile, and the group of Englishmen must rely upon a number of Sikhs and Tonga to ensure that their plan succeeds. The action in the colonies spills into the imperial center, with Small’s thirst for vengeance leading him back to London, having been maimed by life in India and encouraged toward corruption by the local situation (and some of the locals themselves). Paralleling Roylott from “The Speckled Band,” Small (as well as Morstan and the other members of the conspiracy) change for the worse in India; Holmes restores the metropolitan order that their chaotic behavior undermines.

Reading the text more comprehensively, John McBratney suggests in his “Racial and Criminal Types: Indian Ethnography and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *The Sign of Four*” (2005) that the bad influence of the colonies is not the only concern in the text. McBratney notes that the “discourse of racial type exerts a decisive guiding force on much of the Holmes canon,” and that *The Sign of Four* makes this plain in its “description of the Andaman Islanders that Holmes reads to Watson to prove his hunch about the ethnicity” of Tonga (McBratney 154). Asserting that the assumption of anthropological truth provided by this description is a clear marker of imperialist thinking associated with scientific positivism, McBratney finds that “The conformity of Tonga’s characterization to Holmes’s gazetteer’s entry is the clearest link between Doyle’s narrative and contemporaneous British physical anthropology” (McBratney 156). This link neatly brings together the “science” of the empire alongside both its compulsion to explore and catalogue materials efficiently and with finality. Tonga acts as he does because that is the only way he *can* act, from an imperialist position; McBratney reads this as follows:

Doyle’s detective fictions are...finally deeply conservative fantasies of disciplinary control rather than disquieting fables about the subversion of national and imperial norms. Doyle could not conceive of an alterior racial or criminal type as a worthy agent of political change. (McBratney 163)

The existence of the gazetteer defines Tonga so completely that Conan Doyle—and thus of course Holmes—cannot conceive of any divergence from it. As presented by McBratney, the imperial mindset of conquest and control includes within it a sense that once a people have been described they do not vary from that description.

These two stories exemplify the manner in which Holmes texts present the return of colonial activity from the periphery to the metropole. Diane Simmons produces “an

examination of the first thirty eight stories, published from 1888 to 1902, along with the novella *The Hound of the Baskervilles*,” in which “approximately two thirds of the cases are the result not of professional criminal activity, but of some foreign pollution that, like a mysterious disease, has been carried into the country, frequently by returning Britons who have been corrupted during their years abroad” (Simmons 69-70). She suggests that this reveals the truth that “The Sherlock Holmes stories...are not overtly about empire; rather empire is a background taint, constantly seeping into British life” (Simmons 66). Relying on a psychoanalytic reading of imperial narcissism, Simmons finds that the role of empire in the Holmes stories is that of a fear of lost British identity and a management of “two parts of the English psyche: a grandiose image of British powers on the one hand; on the other, the sense of growing vulnerability” (Simmons 67). Their popularity stemmed from the fact that Holmes resolved these difficulties, and that despite the return of corrupted colonials, exemplary English-ness personified by Holmes could maintain the home unchanged. While the Roylotts and Smalls may be tainted by their time away from Britain, upon return their contagion cannot spread, for the great detective is on the case.

As a part of the rhetoric of the British Empire, Sherlock Holmes thus functions in part to preserve the imperial nation against contamination from outside, a role also recognized by Caroline Reitz in her *Detecting the Nation: Fictions of Detection and the Imperial Venture* (2004). Her central premise, that “nineteenth-century detective fiction...helped a national readership imagine the British Empire in a way that was at once destabilizing and reassuring” (Reitz xiii) matches Simmons quite nicely. In place of Simmons’s broader exploration of imperial narcissism across a number of authors and

genres, Reitz focuses on detective fiction as a colonialist project more specifically. Her position is that

The detective narrative turned national concerns about abuses of authority into a popular story about British authority in the contact zone of Victorian culture; this in turn allowed the detective and the imperial project to become extensions of rather than anathema to English national identity. (Reitz xiii)

This explains part of Holmes's popularity for the British reading public, as his actions contain the "contagion" produced by imperial activity and preserve British-ness as a possibility. This is in many ways the epitome of nationalism and the us/them binary of colonialism: Holmes establishes a British identity by cutting away foreign contaminants introduced by life outside the home nation, and the rule of law established by the nation and supported by the detective is only part of the criteria that determines "acceptable" British behavior. Holmes's position outside the established authorities—his amateur status—is in this case a boon for him as a guardian of the nation, as he can exemplify attitudes and exact retributions that might be unacceptable for police, and he does.

Extending this interpretation, Reitz argues that the detective, who reconciles "the idea of individual liberty with the at times aggressive authority needed to maintain social order in a complex new imperial world," can exemplify colonial power "because his authority stemmed from knowledge rather than force and because this knowledge promised mastery of a specifically imperial world" (Reitz xiv). The link between knowledge and mastery here is quite useful, as it completes the previous chapter's association between information and control. The Foucauldian echoes are quite strong, and Reitz establishes the connections between institutions of control such as the police and the imperial project, devoting a chapter to the transfer of colonial police procedures from the colonies to the imperial center. Though the traditional narrative reverses this

order, Reitz effectively shows that many nineteenth-century advances in criminology began in the colonies and were exported to the metropolises, emphasizing the colonial need for effective knowledge in containing resistance and the transport of this containment to the colonizing countries. This reading is particularly important to Reitz's work, which not only recognizes the importance of police powers in the colonies but also finds that both detective and spy fiction exemplify the narratives of control, reading "both fictions of detection and imperial narratives as mutually informing participants in a cultural project that by the time of Doyle and Kipling would be called the Great Game" (Reitz xvii). In her view,

To say that the works of Kipling and Doyle can be partitioned from one another seems shockingly inaccurate. Any reader knows that, from the Great Game at the heart of *Kim* to the Mutiny story at the heart of *The Sign of the Four*, investigation is as central to Kipling as imperial intrigue is to Doyle. (Reitz 65)

Considering these two sets of narratives together, the spy stories of Kipling and the detective texts of Conan Doyle reflect the need held by both modern nations and their colonies for vast reserves of useful data to maintain their control.

Despite the fact that detectives—and spies, with Kipling's *Kim* the central touchstone—often criticize the institutions of power and authority under which they operate, Reitz suggests that this "criticism of official authority...throughout the tradition of detective and imperial narratives is not a renunciation of authority, but an argument for the necessity of better authority through a centralized system of local knowledge" (Reitz 76). These criticisms do not suggest that the imperial project is worthless or that Britain is wrong to pursue it and instead offer up strategies and practices that *improve* the construction and maintenance of empire. For this reason, Reitz believes that "detective fiction makes imperialism central to what it means to be English" (Reitz 68)—that is, the

act of resolving the difficulties posed by imperial expansion is quintessentially British. Capably doing so with the aid of information, hard work, and know-how is part of what separates Great Britain from the countries that it colonizes; knowledge, often “scientific” in nature, and control go hand in hand. Reitz’s connection of Conan Doyle with Kipling is usefully predictive here, as Norbu relies on this connection in his *Mandala*, despite some separation between the figures in his reading, and Reitz is not the only one to see the link between the authors. Yumna Siddiqi, in her *Anxieties of Empire and the Fiction of Intrigue* (2008), also recognizes that “on the face of it” “British imperial fiction and detective fiction are...distinct genres of writing” (Siddiqi 17), but that “Detective and spy fiction” share significantly more than is often assumed.

Picking up on the criticisms that Reitz reads as supportive of empire, Siddiqi argues that the two genres “quite strikingly anticipate[...] contemporary metropolitan expressions of anxiety about social, political, and economic instability in former colonial territories” (Siddiqi 2). In her focus on the problems and uncertainties unearthed by detective and spy fiction, she recognizes that they are not clear markers of concern because “literature does not in a simple, unmediated way merely reflect or express social anxieties...It plays an active role in shaping and circulating them” (Siddiqi 22). In this way, when detectives and spies expose gaps in the apparatus of control, those revelations can certainly provide proof of continued work in shoring up the imperial project, what Siddiqi reads as exploiting “cultural anxieties in such a way as to entertain a wide audience” (Siddiqi 22). Equally, however, such a demonstration highlights areas of concern and can be read by twenty-first century critics as a sometimes unconscious

awareness of the impossibility of the problem, echoing Wynne's reading of the Gothic themes in Conan Doyle as a manifestation of worry over the very idea of empire.

Despite these acknowledgements, Siddiqi ends with a reading quite similar to that of Reitz (also echoing the previous chapter's interest in science):

In short, while Sherlock Holmes stories register anxiety about the possible inscrutability and unruliness of Britain's imperial territories, they also present a fictional solution to these perceived problems in the character and method of the detective. Holmes is a guarantor of stability and order...[succeeding] not by adhering rigidly to scientific, rational principles but by combining these principles with an instinctive, conjectural style that better equips him to contend with the variegated elements of an expanding imperial world. (Siddiqi 30)

In her reading of Conan Doyle's character, she clearly establishes not only the value of the detective as a force of containment for the problems of empire but also the importance of thinking creatively in doing so. Holmes and Kim do not ensure the continuance of the British Empire by simply creating charts and relying upon statistics, they make full use of their ability to generate controlling narratives that allow them to establish this "stability and order."<sup>4</sup> Thus, while "Detective fiction demonstrates the validity of Enlightenment rationality [and] celebrates the ability of the detective to counter ignorance and to redress social infractions through the systematic use of reason and scientific method" (Siddiqi 25), it also recognizes the importance of the narrative act in the deployment of this rationality. The detective and the spy work in the two primary poles of the colonial world, each of them using similar techniques, strategies, and—most importantly—beliefs in the preservation of the imperial world. Both Siddiqi and Reitz effectively express the link between detective fiction and empire in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but this link might be clarified with a distinction between the

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<sup>4</sup> This reading neatly reiterates the treatment of Holmes's method as "abductive" rather than "deductive" in the previous chapter. See page 118.

defense of (and thus creation of) the nation as opposed to the empire; the two are often spoken of together, but, as Ronald R. Thomas and Jon Thompson suggest, Holmes is far more an agent of British nationalism than a supporter of imperialism. Certainly, support of Great Britain as a nation entails an acceptance of the imperial project, but there is a subtle difference between acceptance and endorsement.

As noted above, Holmes often works to clean up messes made by returning colonials, and in Ronald R. Thomas's "The Fingerprint of the Foreigner: Colonizing the Criminal Body in 1890s Detective Fiction and Criminal Anthropology" (1994), this role is of central importance. Relying on the detective's interest in criminal anthropology, Thomas argues that "whatever else Sherlock Holmes may have claimed to be, he should be understood as the literary personification of an elaborate cultural apparatus by which persons were given their true and legitimate identities by someone else" (Thomas 656). For Thomas, Holmes demonstrates the possibility of cataloguing a population thoroughly enough to control them, a position similar to that of Reitz; however, what Thomas recognizes here is the popularization of the *idea* of this cataloguing action, such that Holmes himself becomes the avatar of state control through knowledge. He asserts that "fictions of criminality link questions of *personal* identity and physiology with questions of *national* identity and security in ways that redefine the relation of an individual's body with the body politic" (Thomas 655, emphasis in original), and it is telling that here Holmes is associated with the nation in this work and not the empire. Certainly, as Reitz recognizes in her text, the construction of personal identity through the intervention of the state is something that has part of its roots in colonial police efforts, and thus there is an undeniable imperial connection to Holmes's role here. That said, Holmes takes this work



and makes it the center of the construction of national authority within the home country; his cultural anthropology, which separates the Tongas of the world from the Royslotts, also defines a central Britishness (which he also exemplifies) that he must police in his actions as a detective, separate from other countries' essential identities.

In his *Fiction, Crime and Empire: Clues to Modernity and Postmodernity* (1993)

Jon Thompson clarifies Holmes's role as a nationalist protector by demonstrating that Conan Doyle's fiction does not seek to engage in debate about the issues that motivate its detective's cases, instead pushing "to the margins almost every potentially disruptive subject imaginable—racism, imperialism, class conflict, even women" (Thompson 68). The inclusion of imperialism in this list is particularly telling, as although the Holmes narratives work "in conjunction with an ideology of imperialism" alongside the "ideology of empiricism" in the form of the stories, that imperialist logic is not only kept away from the center of the majority of the texts but is actively denied. Essentially, Holmes works to ensure that the colonies do not change what Britain is, paradoxically wrapping both the possession of and the immunity to colonies into the very definition of British-ness. Though certainly impossible, one role performed by Holmes according to Thompson is the confirmation of Britain's cultural invulnerability in the face of cultural contact; Britain remains untouched by the possession and maintenance of lands that have rules and expectations that differ quite widely from its own. For Thompson, who reads Holmes's popularity through mass culture—"one of the crucial arenas for the resistance, acceptance, or incorporation of hegemonic values" (Thompson 6)—the detective's ability to perform this task "did not simply *reflect* a preformed, given, monolithic middle-class ideology" but instead "helped *produce* a comforting and reassuring image of society

untroubled by sexual, economic, or social pressures” (Thompson 75, emphasis in original). Holmes’s ability to purge or sideline that which is not British, including colonial influences, increasing appearances of the New Woman, and worries over class division, here produces the purgation he performs.

For Thompson, these efforts define the culture. The empirical, scientific appearance of the text, “What perhaps appears at first glance to be a purely formal device—style—reflecting an objective reality” does far more than that: it is “a crucial element in the production of the Holmes myth” (Thompson 62), helping readers believe that the detective stories reflect reality and thus that his work extends beyond the page. With this belief in mind, the myth of Sherlock Holmes “is not simply a myth of an eccentric but brilliant detective, but a myth of knowledge and, ultimately, a myth of society” (Thompson 62). The detective helps to shape the society that reads him and believes that he truthfully represents the world, even if that society is not British; couched in the language of empiricism, the proclamations and decisions of Holmes carry a ring of truth that, while separate from any real truths, provides a comforting illusion of control and mastery for the sleuth’s audiences. Wrapping up his discussion of Holmes, Thompson asserts that

Within the economy of power in late-Victorian England, the Sherlock Holmes myth produced consent to this economy [of masculine, colonial authority] by simplification and omission, processes that perform the naturalizing function of myth...This is the world of Sherlock Holmes—a world in which crime is intriguing, individual, and eminently soluble, not an ugly social problem; a world in which urban squalor makes a quaint contrast to the elegance of London hansom cabs and gas street lamps; a world undisturbed by conflict, whether sexual or social. (Thompson 76-77)

The “myth” of Holmes provides a narrative for its audiences that clarifies problems and provides easy solutions. It is unnecessary to fear the change brought by the possession

and control of colonies, for true British folk will ensure that such changes do not last; the growing equality of women is also not a troublesome matter, for they will always need the help of men despite their new freedoms. These stories confirm beliefs held about the British—both by themselves and others around the world—and thus function to create and reaffirm what it means to be born British. Sherlock Holmes's world stands over the real world as a better, easier to know sense of how things work.

This work gestures back toward the previous chapter, in which the detective determines the role of women without their input; here the thread of imperialism is added to the determinations made by Holmes. Partha Basu's book is thus valuable as a critique of Holmes's assured sense that the world is exactly as he believes it to be, even if the novel is less interested in seeing what the detective still has to offer contemporary readers. The separation between nationalism and imperialism discussed above—though admittedly somewhat roughly sketched—is central to the other primary text of this chapter, Jamyang Norbu's *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, as his reframing of the detective places him alongside a traditional postcolonial revision while leaving Conan Doyle's creation largely intact. In Norbu's novel, the role of the detective is similar to that described by Thomas and Thompson here: protect the nation. However, Norbu switches Holmes's allegiance to a new country, Tibet, and frames a cultural program declaring the independence of Tibet from China around the very role performed by Holmes in the canonical tales.

### ***The Mandala and the Postcolonial***

Jamyang Norbu's novel *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* offers readers a story that fills in one of the great holes in the Holmes canon chronology, the period from

somewhere between 1891 and 1894, when the detective first disappeared from the world after having “died” at the hands of his arch enemy, Professor James Moriarty, in the short story “The Final Problem” and when he then reappeared to Watson in “The Adventure of the Empty House”. Norbu’s contribution to the canon refigures the Holmes/Watson relationship with a new narrator, one Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, a character from Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim*, and sets the two borrowed characters against an initially unknown foe who turns out to be a joint enemy consisting of both Moriarty and the Chinese authority in Tibet, called an “Amban.” After an assault against the detective in Bombay performed by Moriarty’s henchman Colonel Moran, Mookerjee escorts Holmes to Simla, where he teaches Holmes some of the Tibetan language but discourages the detective from attempting to visit the country, noting both Tibet’s general suspicion of outsiders and the fact that

the Manchu throne has claimed certain suzerain rights in Thibet, and has established two Manchu representatives called Ambans in Lhasa, the capital city...At the moment, unfortunately, not only has the senior Manchu Amban in Lhasa, Count O-erh-t’ai, gained an ascendancy over the Dalai Lama and the Thibetan government, but he also has an intense and virulent hatred for all Europeans, especially the English. (92)

At this moment in the text, the text’s postcolonial concerns appear for the first time as part of its story; much of the book’s remainder follows Holmes’s trip into Tibet and his attempts to prevent Chinese agents in Tibet from usurping the thirteenth Dalai Lama’s authority before he comes of age. Norbu casts the Chinese officials in Tibet as the villains in the tale, even bringing back Moriarty as “The Dark One” (195), a Tibetan master of occult powers, who had been corrupted by the Chinese and works to gain control of Tibet for them, while figuring Holmes as the re-ensouled Tibetan foe of Moriarty, the “Gangsar *trulku*” (242). Thus the novel sets up a Manichean organization for the colonial

relationship: the villain of the piece is both Holmes's nemesis and a Tibetan working for the Chinese, while the hero is both Holmes himself and a Tibetan who saves the life of the Dalai Lama.

The treatment of China as the enemy of a sovereign Tibet appears in Norbu's preface even before becoming a central theme of the novel; however, more than ninety pages must pass between Norbu's extra-textual statement that a modern "Tibet may lie crushed beneath the dead weight of Chinese tyranny, but the truth about Tibet cannot be so easily buried" (xv) and Mookerjee's explanation of this statement to Holmes within the narrative. The preface establishes the Chinese presence in Tibet as interference from a foreign power in the operations of a sovereign nation—hence a form of colonial occupation. Though the story does not pick up this thread immediately, it consistently sets up China and the Manchu rulers there as the book's antagonists from their first appearance. Norbu's novel explicitly casts China as a colonizing power, an external force reaching into Tibet and demanding that it operate as a part of a greater Chinese empire. However, the author's location as a Tibetan-in-exile living in India, his conflation of turn-of-the-century China with a modern Chinese nation-state, the confusion inherent in debates regarding China's historical role in Tibet (and vice-versa), and the divided use of characters from Victorian English fiction complicate his efforts to build support for his claims tremendously. In short, though we can treat the novel as a postcolonial text due to its focus on contemporary forms of colonialism, we must also interrogate its unequivocal reliance on a Tibetan nationalist view of history. Norbu's novel thus relies upon a largely canonical version of Holmes to support the author's nationalist cause, complicating reader expectations about anti-colonial strategies.

## Norbu in Exile

Perhaps the least immediately notable of the concerns above, Jamyang Norbu's position as a member of the Tibetan exile community in India does not initially seem important. He is part of the community formed after the Dalai Lama left Tibet to escape the Chinese government, after which a "Tibetan Government in Exile," called the Central Tibetan Administration, was formed in 1959 at Dharamsala, India. Now, more than one hundred thousand exiled Tibetans support their work as an independent voice for Tibet and Tibetan rights. This community, with the Dalai Lama at the forefront and Jamyang Norbu as a member, has argued that Tibet should be an autonomous region—with some even going so far to insist that the Chinese presence in Tibet is an illegitimate military occupation and that the independence of Tibet is unquestionable.<sup>5</sup> Norbu is an outspoken critic of the Chinese government, and his description of "Chinese tyranny" in the preface to *The Mandala* echoes much of his non-fictional work, where he has called for a significantly more "confrontational" approach to Chinese occupation (Vembu paragraph 8). The book's decision to align Holmes with the Dalai Lama and other "good" Tibetans and its presentation of Chinese interference and aggression paired with his representation of Moriarty as a Tibetan collaborating with the Chinese mirror Norbu's Manichean perception of his native country's political situation. For him as well as for the majority of Tibetans-in-exile, the Chinese occupation seeks to force Tibet to join a specifically Chinese movement into a "modernized" world, remaking Tibet into a province of China instead of allowing it to exist as an independent nation-space. Nevertheless, Norbu's

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<sup>5</sup> My presentation of the relationship between the Dalai Lama and the exile community elides some of the important differences. The Dalai Lama generally maintains that a truly autonomous Tibet within China is an acceptable position, while other parts of the exile community—including Norbu—believe that Tibet should be a sovereign nation unto itself. For simplicity's sake, my paper will focus on Norbu's position.

criticism and presentation of the situation comes at a remove from those Tibetans who still live and work in Tibet.

This concern lies at the heart of Wang Lixiong and Tsering Shakya's 2009 book, *The Struggle for Tibet*, a text combining Chinese (Lixiong) and Tibetan (Shakya) perspectives. Opening with a postcolonial concern for "all situations where a powerful centre dominates the voices of those it perceives as outsiders," the two writers explore and expose a number of perspectives regarding the Chinese presence in Tibet, often focusing on "what happened [in Tibet], who its inhabitants are, and what they think of what they have experienced" (1-2). The shift in tense is vital here, as although the two authors differ significantly regarding the past of Tibet ("what happened") their discussion of the contemporary situation of Tibet is united in focusing on actual conditions in Tibet and how they impact the people living there. The text's description of talks between China and the exile leadership of Tibet marks this clearly: "Essentially, those talks had taken place between two outside bodies, Chinese and exile, under foreign pressure, concerning a mute entity called Tibet that took no part in these discussions" (15). The statement lays bare their interest in both the Chinese Government and the Tibetan exile authorities "speaking for" the Tibetans living inside Tibet, a position that asks us to think carefully about treating the position of exiled Tibetans as equivalent to that of Tibetans in Tibet. Indeed, Lixiong and Shakya indict the Central Tibetan Administration "a powerful centre" that dominates the debate while remaining external to the situation, thereby charging anyone with interest in the relationship between Tibet and China to carefully inspect what they read, including novels like Norbu's.

Mitigating factors complicate this argument, such as the difficulty Tibetans in Tibet face when attempting to speak freely, the problem of defining an exile community as a center, and the value of suggesting that exiled Tibetans cannot speak of their homeland without having their motives questioned. Additionally, Lixiong and Shakya's book clearly falls on the side of Tibetans both in and exiled from Tibet, arguing that the Chinese occupation is not only unwanted but violates the rights of Tibetans throughout the world. That said, their concern for Tibetans in exile "speaking for" Tibetans in Tibet remains useful, so we cannot completely accept Norbu's presentation of the Chinese Amban as comically villainous and the Tibetans as heroic. His position qualifies him to speak of his experiences and concerns, but the ability to speak for all Tibetans on this complicated subject does not follow. Despite Lixiong and Shakya's emphasis on the importance of the in-Tibet perspective, Norbu's presentation of the Chinese presence as a military occupation resonates with the Tibetan perspective discussed by Shakya and Lixiong, such that his concerns do not clash with those of the majority of Tibetans. Implicit in this recognition of difference between the exiles and those that remain in Tibet, neither perspective exhausts the possibilities of other claims—such as those of the Chinese state. Nevertheless, we must recognize the assertions of Norbu's book as emerging from his diasporic location, part of the exiled Tibetan voice, part of the Tibetan diaspora. In sum, Norbu's exile status leaves his claim and his book in a fascinating predicament: his position outside Tibet and his claim to speak for the country and its history from the outside must be treated with caution, yet imagining who else he might speak for is difficult.



Steven Venturino addresses this very problem in his essay on Tibetan literature and *The Mandala*, arguing that “for contemporary Tibetan writers [Chinese] colonialism means either exile—a stateless place—or occupation—an antagonistically shared place,” such that in either condition Tibetan fiction is “in the important epistemological position of being informed by more than one place at a time” (304). The exiled writers in India, for example, are products of their diasporic location in exile, profoundly influenced by Indian literature, popular culture, and the remnants of European colonialism (for example, Jamyang Norbu went to St. Joseph’s School, organized and run by Jesuits in Darjeeling, as a boy), whereas Chinese influences inundate Tibetan writers in Tibet and many of them write in Chinese. For Venturino, this makes the texts produced by both groups a fascinating case for postcolonial and postmodern studies, as the shared aspects of both groups (language, history) throws their disparate influences into relief, especially in terms of their response to non-Western colonialisms. Venturino’s recognition that each group cannot help but be influenced by its location in India or Tibet respectfully counterbalances Lixiong and Shakya’s concern for the voice of Tibetans in Tibet, as it recognizes the value of both discourses and looks carefully at how questions of location and history bear on each writer, modifying the strategies they use to entertain or convince their audiences. Venturino thus provides a perspective that allows diasporic voices like Norbu’s to remain a vital component of a very problematic discussion.

Norbu’s text cannot help but be from outside of Tibet, and as such it cannot completely represent Tibetans within Tibet; therefore, the claims it makes must be read from the perspective of his diasporic location; indeed, the author won the India-based Economist Crossword Book Award for *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* in 1999, a prize

granted to books written by Indian citizens. At the same time, Norbu's text cannot help but be Tibetan, and the author's background separates him from classification as entirely Indian or European, despite the influence these spaces have had upon him in exile. The complexity of this situation supports Venturino's claim that "the unique aspects of Tibetan works should lead us to reevaluate and revise [postcolonial and postmodern] approaches in light of their implied assumptions of national identity" (303). For him, the placement of Norbu's book in a specific spatial category of literary study depends in large part upon how strongly "national identity" is a determining factor; lacking a "nation" in terms of sovereignty, Tibetans are outside of any canon that requires the idea of a "nation" around which to organize a set of texts. Venturino presents the Tibetan situation as a fascinating problem case for postcolonial studies, which he asserts has not sufficiently considered the position of non-national or borderland literatures fully enough. Fascinatingly, in *The Mandala* Norbu makes attempts to move Tibet out of these borderlands by making a direct case for its status as a nation, both in the past and in terms of its claims for sovereignty in the present, using descriptions of the space provided to Holmes and specifically "national" terminology throughout the book.

### History and Independence

Projecting the modernist idea of an independent nation-state into the nineteenth century past of Tibet is necessary to the mission the title character performs in *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, as his central goal is to protect the Dalai Lama from the depredations of "Black China—cunning and hungry for land" (Norbu 154). In the description given to Holmes by one of the Dalai Lama's subordinates, Lama Yonten, "Thibet is a small and peaceful country...[surrounded by] warlike nations, powerful and

restless as titans” (154, spelling as in text), an account that not only assumes the idea of Tibet’s unity and sovereignty in the face of overwhelming external forces but also enumerates these threats as the English Empire and Russian Czar before concluding with “Black China.” In this configuration, Tibet is set up as a small, independent country under assault from a number of other imperial powers, the most important of which is the Chinese, as they are most immediately undermining Tibetan authority. Norbu elides the fact that the nineteenth century Tibetan authorities with the Dalai Lama at their head, or even the present Dalai Lama, did not control all of what is today known as Tibet or claimed as such by the Tibetan government in exile, exerting authority only over part of it. In an attempt to convince Holmes to support the Dalai Lama, Yonten explains that his work “will ensure the rule of His Holiness and the future happiness of our *nation*” (234, emphasis mine), and upon the Dalai Lama’s “Assumption of Spiritual and Temporal Power” the text describes him as the “Spiritual and Temporal Ruler of all Thibet” (257). Three threads emerge here and elsewhere throughout the text: the concept of Tibet as an independent nation, the status of the Dalai Lama as the ruler of a unified Tibet, and the threat of a monolithic aggressive China unified under their Emperor. Not only is China placed in the same category as Great Britain in terms of imperial drive, but the country is shown as willing to acquire lands by subverting the rule of legitimate local authorities. These authorities generally (and the Dalai Lama in particular) speak for a unified Tibet, and the text presents no Tibetan characters that question their decisions, save those few dissidents who have been corrupted by the Chinese, such as Moriarty. The presumption of Tibet as a “nation” in control of its own destiny underpins all of Holmes’s work to preserve the Dalai Lama, and the text places his success in doing so just before an

epilogue in which we learn that the Grand Lama he saved, the thirteenth, later officially declared the independence of Tibet in 1913. The novel implies that without Holmes to do this work, China's imperialist designs would remain unchecked and Tibet would never have had the chance to establish its independence, an independence which makes the later Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet illegal, at least from Norbu's point of view.

John Powers' *History as Propaganda* helps provide an explanation for the text's strong desire to establish Tibetan independence in the pre-Chinese occupation past, arguing that "Tibetan writers want to internalize the issue of Tibet's historical status and...convince readers that Tibet was an independent nation that was brutally and illegally invaded by its imperialist neighbor" (8). The primary Tibetan strategy used to accomplish this in Powers' book is historical interpretation, with both Tibet and China mobilizing the historical record to prove either that Tibet was an independent nation-state, which is the position of the exiled Tibetan leadership and many Tibetans throughout the world, or that Tibet had been a province of China even before the Chinese army took over, which is the official position of the Chinese government. Unfortunately for both sides, Powers demonstrates that while the historical "facts" they present tend to be relatively similar, their interpretations of that history leads to problems. The narrative of "Tibet's historical status" can be interpreted in too many ways for it to be usable as truth or fact, and even though Norbu would like to argue both for the colonialist designs of China and for Tibet's status as an independent nation with full sovereign authority, his work is effectively a form of retroactive continuity. Following in the footsteps of other nationalists, such as Jawaharlal Nehru in his *The Discovery of India*, Norbu projects the idea of a unified, autonomous nation into the past. The goals of the modern Chinese state

are made to extend backwards into the past, informing their prior relationship with Tibet, then the narrative of Tibetan sovereignty and the modern nation-state are made to fit the older Tibetan situation. Norbu does not project his nationalist narrative quite as far back as Nehru, focusing on the moment in which the Dalai Lama himself attempted to create a nation that went largely unrecognized by foreign powers; this time, however, Holmes is there to assist the claim.

Powers' reading of this history focuses primarily on the difficulty of using it to support one position or another, but the problem exists in large measure due to the chaos surrounding the period of decolonization in the first half of the twentieth century, according to Dibyesh Anand. In his article "Tibet, China, and the West: Empires of the Mind," he convincingly argues that the "ideas of sovereignty and nationalism were originally western, but non-western actors have long appropriated them to transform their own sense of political community" (paragraph 12). Faced with the threat of outside invasion, countries without a strong concept of the nation-state quickly began to adopt it in the hope of maintaining their own sovereignty and identity. He argues that while neither Tibet nor China were nations in the western sense at the beginning of the twentieth century, the British occupation of India and subsequent interactions with Tibet and China demonstrated that centralized authority and a unified national identity were key to securing autonomy. While China managed to establish itself as a nation in this way after the emergence of a stable government in the late nineteenth century, Tibet's attempts in the same time period "to gain international support for recognition of their independent status came to nothing...and it was China, not Tibet, which found the concept of sovereignty most useful to its interests and ambitions" (Anand paragraph 11). For Anand,

the problem facing Tibet boiled down to creating the perception of a nation-state, and they failed to capitalize on the chance and “lost out at the crucial moment of decolonization” before they were subsumed by the Chinese narrative which Tibet claimed was an intrinsic part of their territory (Anand paragraph 13).

Norbu’s text tries to right this wrong but it needs a unified, effective force against which to define the actions of Tibet, and thus also assumes a great deal about Chinese actions at the turn of the century, presenting these activities as a cohesive, motivated effort performed by a sovereign China. Much like Anand, Powers asks us to reconsider this characterization of China, claiming that Chinese authorities and Tibetan exiles

incorrectly conceive China and Tibet prior to the modern period in terms derived from the modern nation-state, but this paradigm is not appropriate...[because their] peripheries overlapped, and there was ongoing military, political, and cultural contact between them. (158)

Here, Powers underscores a major problem with the kind of retroactive work Norbu’s text performs, as its status as a novel exploring historical truth is undermined. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century China did not operate like a “modern nation-state,” making attempts to categorize it as such a misrepresentation of the facts. Though Norbu would like to suggest that China was as potent a colonial force as Great Britain during the nineteenth century—a significantly more unified nation with a sense of colonial “duty” and expansionist goals—this is simply not the case. Despite Norbu’s desire for it to be so (even as a means of mustering anti-colonial fervor against Chinese), Powers shows that the relationship between China and Tibet includes far too extensive an exchange of ideas and power for a colonial relationship between the two in 1892 to make sense.

Much of the debate regarding the relationship between China and Tibet in Norbu's story revolves around the difficult terminology of the time, particularly the level of influence implied by "suzerainty," which is a term that implies neither sovereign control nor independence. Powers opens his description of the situation from the British perspective in 1904, who "conceded that China had "suzerainty" over Tibet, which meant that it recognized that Tibet was a protectorate of China...[but] denied that China exercised "sovereignty" over the region, which meant that...the Tibetans were in control of their own affairs" (178). It would be hard to state the difficulties of establishing the independence of Tibet more plainly, and despite the certainty that Great Britain acted based upon their own goals in this description, their confusion serves as a signal of the issue's intricacy. Anand notes that in the Chinese transition to the modern-nation state they modify their relationship with Tibet, moving "from 'suzerainty-autonomy' to 'sovereignty-autonomy'," essentially maintaining Tibet's "autonomous" role while altering their status from the complex relationship of suzerainty to the more immediately authoritative sovereignty. Though Powers acknowledges the problems of assuming either the independence of Tibet or the control of China and Anand recognizes that Tibet missed the historical moment for assuming the status of a modern nation-state, Norbu's presentation of the relationship projects China's contemporary colonization of Tibet into the past, beginning with the incursion of China into Tibet through their Ambans and the eventual escape of the Dalai Lama from their control. Approaching this presentation from a postcolonial perspective creates an interesting recursion: as an exiled Tibetan, Norbu's text serves as both an imposition (as an exile) and an explanation (as a Tibetan), and his desire to combat the colonial actions of modern China encourages him to reconfigure the

past to suit contemporary understandings of the relationship between a powerful center and a weaker periphery. Norbu's text elides any difficulties, historical or social, and replaces them with a Tibetan exile's certainty regarding the motives of China and the enduring continuity of "Tibet" as a nation. *The Mandala* thus intercedes in a complex, potentially irresolvable debate, attempting to convince readers to support claims for Tibetan independence by revising the past using the framework of a detective novel—all while navigating the difficult postcolonial situation in India and the difficulties of exile.

### Postcolonial (Re)Visions

The plot's traditional nature hides the extraordinary complexity of these relationships, using a conventional Holmesian investigation and adventure as the structure into which Norbu's goals are nested. As this complexity underlies the narrative and its presentation of Holmes and Mookerjee, an understanding of how the novel approaches each character in a different manner provides insight into the ways each one supports Norbu's efforts differently. The novel treats these two characters in entirely different ways, approaching Mookerjee as a character reclaimed in the previously discussed fashion of Jean Rhys' treatment of Bertha Mason in *Wide Sargasso Sea* yet avoiding framing Holmes within such a solid postcolonial critique. The separation between the treatments of these two characters provides a useful clue about how the text organizes its critique of the contemporary occupation of Tibet, and the paired approaches point us back toward the productive value of overlapping strategies: here, the postcolonial Mookerjee and the more postmodern Holmes. Critically, the function of Holmes as a defender of the nation is crucial to Norbu's project, and he separates Conan Doyle's detective from the colonialist structure of the canon to a large degree. Norbu



needs an empiricist Holmes to support his “objective” claims for Tibetan nationalism. At the same time, Norbu criticizes colonialist texts in his portrayal of Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, whose role in Kipling’s novel is as a loyal British subject. Understanding this criticism will help clarify the absence of criticism directed at Holmes and forms a substantive part of Norbu’s other postcolonial work—echoing Basu here—as his reconstruction of the character continues his critique of colonialism while setting the stage for a valuable nationalist Holmes.

Immediately after the preface informs the reader of Norbu’s positions regarding Tibet, the first-person narrative of the novel begins and Hurree Chunder Mookerjee makes his introduction by criticizing Rudyard Kipling:

‘The Great Game...’ Good heavens! Could anyone think of a more infelicitous and beastly awful expression to describe the vital diplomatic activities of the Ethnological Survey... This excretious appellation was the creation of one Mr Rudyard Kipling... who, with deplorable journalistic flippancy, managed... to debase the very important activities of our department (xix)

Mookerjee’s complaints cue us to both his status as a character originally in Kipling’s novel *Kim* as well as *The Mandala*’s disdain for that book and its author. Although taken from Kipling, Norbu transforms Mookerjee significantly in his text, reconstructing him as a vital *aide-de-camp* for Holmes and granting him substantially more influence on the resolution of the plot than Watson generally had in the Conan Doyle originals. In his opening lines, Mookerjee indicates the depth of this revision, indicting Kipling’s “debasement” of the department he worked for and thus the people, such as himself, who work within it. This decision separates Norbu’s version of the character from Kipling’s rather sharply, as the Victorian author’s depiction remains mired in casual racism and caricature despite the few positive qualities he demonstrates.

Kipling's novel provides a significantly different introduction for Mookerjee, in which his physical presence as "a hulking, obese Babu whose stockinged legs shook with fat" (252) serves as the reader's first impression. The term "Babu" could either be an honorific similar to "sir" (though this would more likely be written as "Babu-ji") or a pejorative name for an Indian in the British colonies with limited education and minor English-reading abilities—an unfortunate way to introduce the first character of the text. This particular Babu is Mookerjee, who works with the small group of spies that train Kim as an agent of the British Empire in India, overseeing Kim on several occasions. However, Kipling's text rarely presents the character in an entirely positive light, often treating him as a giggling coward who takes credit for others' work, as when he reimagines Kim's efforts in causing a group of Russian spies problems as his own (Kipling 399-400). Perhaps even more damning from our perspective, the text places a great deal of weight on Mookerjee's desire to be "made a member of the Royal Society by taking ethnological notes" (276), which endears him to Colonel Creighton, the central British agent in the text. This desire for membership in the organization is problematic because of the emphasis it places on both the value of the colonizer's system of collecting knowledge and the implied goal of becoming more like (or liked by) the British, turning Mookerjee into a mimic of the British. The manner of gaining entry to this institution raises further concerns, since Mookerjee's ethnological work requires that he learn what he can of the cultures in and around India and then write them up for the acquisition of the British Empire. In one of *Kim*'s most troublesome passages, Mookerjee describes having the opportunity to speak with Kim's Tibetan lama and says that he "took notes of his statements for the Royal Society" (448) just after he was described as capable of

leaving all his “Babu-dom” aside while remaining capable of lying “like a Bengali” (429 and 453, respectively). Kipling’s vision of Mookerjee is a fascinating case of colonial assumptions, with extreme anglophilia and work as a cultural middle-man for the British authority immediately juxtaposed with the most casual of racisms. The text’s colonialist sympathies cannot be overstated here; instead of a portrait of a complex individual, Kipling presents us with a stereotyped Bengali whose only remarkable feature is his ability to put aside his silly native demeanor and focus on the task of collecting information for the British, either as a spy or an intellectual.

Norbu recognizes the problems of Kipling’s presentation of ethnography and Mookerjee’s stated desire to join the Royal Society and begins to attack them within the first pages of his novel. In particular, *Kim*’s description of this “Ethnological Survey” work is roundly rejected in Mookerjee’s introduction and Norbu separates the character from the Royal Society in two primary ways: granting him the desired membership and resituating his desire for knowledge within a non-Western paradigm. Mookerjee’s inclusion in the Royal Society appears within the introduction when Norbu states that the adventures of *The Mandala* resulted “in the fulfillment of [his] life-long dream to become a Fellow of the Royal Society” (xxiii), and Norbu never mentions the issue again. Completely ignoring the characterization presented in Kipling’s book would have been difficult, so Norbu instead shows his lack of interest in this goal by acknowledging and dismissing it before the novel proper begins. In a more subtle repositioning of the Royal Society, Norbu establishes Mookerjee’s rationale for his studies in a position outside of Western philosophy, describing him as a “Brahmo Somajist,” which the text explains is an intellectual society dedicated to “the principles of reason and the rights of the

individual as expressed in the *Upanishads*,” which are “basic to both Hindu and Western thought” (76). This simple description undercuts Kipling’s positioning of Mookerjee’s central goal as acceptance to the Royal Society by establishing the importance of knowledge and reason to non-Western cultures. Alongside Norbu’s quick dismissal of the Royal Society, this provides a very different picture of Mookerjee; instead of a man so obsessed with belonging to a foreign institution that he strip-mines the cultures around him, he appears as a cross-cultural intellectual in Norbu’s fictional reconstruction, learning and sharing knowledge for the sake of learning itself.

Throughout the novel, Norbu’s Mookerjee demonstrates many of the traits described by Kipling, including fear and bravery in the face of danger. Perhaps because the text is written with Mookerjee as the narrator, the character becomes significantly more multi-faceted, and providing the reader such incredible access to the character’s thoughts performs much of the work of this re-vision on its own. A great deal of this new characterization comes through Norbu’s recognition and incorporation of details from the life of Sarat Chandra Das, the man who served as the basis for Kipling’s character. Das was a late nineteenth century Bengali explorer and intellectual who wrote of his several visits to Tibet, the text of which provided significant information to the British government regarding the relationship between China and Tibet. He was given an award by the Royal Geographic Society for his efforts. Kipling’s character was at least “partly drawn from Sarat Chandra Das” (Rintoul 348, Hopkirk 224), and the parallels between the two cannot be a mere coincidence: both are Bengali scholars, both have extensive interest in Tibet, and both have connections to the British authorities, even though it does not appear that Das had much interest in assisting the British Empire, specifically. Das

was so engaged with Tibetan culture and religion that he was called the “‘Ka-che lama,’ or the lama from Kashmir” by those living with him at the Peking lamasery (Das xiv). His writings make his dedication to Tibet as a place of learning clear, but Kipling chose to make Das’s accolades from and service to the Empire the focus of his career, reducing the man’s achievements sharply. In place of a multi-lingual intellectual interested in the preservation of knowledge, Kipling presents Mookerjee/Das as a useful tool of Empire, a mimic man with only the interests of the crown at heart. Norbu makes the connection between Mookerjee and Das more obvious, having Holmes inquire after a Tibetan-English Dictionary Mookerjee wrote in the novel. Das actually wrote such a book, *A Tibetan-English dictionary, with Sanskrit synonyms*, and Norbu’s recognition of this (not to mention inclusion of it in the book along with summarized versions of Das’ travels into Tibet described as events Mookerjee experienced) show his greater interest in the reality of the situation than in Kipling’s “Great Game.” In this Norbu indicts Kipling yet again, pointing out his failure to see value in the work done by his non-Western characters except as part of service to the Empire as he reconnects this colonialist fiction with the complex reality.

The work of resituating these fictions within their political contexts and exposing their colonial efforts makes up much of Edward Said’s *Culture and Imperialism*, in which the work of connecting novels “not only with pleasure and profit but also with the imperial process of which they were manifestly and unconcealedly a part” (xiv) drives the book forward. Norbu’s novel takes Said’s project out of the realm of criticism and places it directly in the text of his novel; *The Mandala* pulls the character of Mookerjee out of *Kim* to confront “stereotypes about ‘the African [or Indian...] mind, the notions

about bringing civilization to primitive or barbaric peoples” (xi, brackets in original). Said himself notes the importance of recognizing *Kim*’s “insistence on the belief that the Indian reality required, indeed beseeched British tutelage more or less indefinitely” (xxi), represented in part by Mookerjee’s desire to be of value to those most eminent British tutors, the Royal Society. In stripping Mookerjee of this encumbering trait and providing him with independent intellectual motivations for his journey, Norbu “recovers” the character from *Kim* and allows him an articulate critique of colonialist attitudes. In this way, Norbu’s work shares more in common with Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea*, which takes the character of the mad, attic-hidden Bertha Mason from *Jane Eyre* and explores the cultural forces that placed her in that circumstance. Rhys’ text reappropriates Mason by exploring the facile way *Jane Eyre* hides her as a foreign remnant of the past, telling her story and refiguring her presence in Charlotte Bronte’s original novel. Norbu does similar work, if perhaps less drastic in scope, by reframing Mookerjee within *The Mandala*, reappropriating the Bengali intellectual in a compelling critique of Kipling’s colonialist caricatures.

The “recuperation” of Mookerjee aligns with and strengthens Norbu’s attempt to present the Chinese occupation of Tibet in his own terms. His postcolonial critique of Kipling’s imperialist tendencies reinforces his presentation of the Chinese as foreign occupiers by emphasizing an accepted, Western model of imperialism and critiquing it alongside a discussion of the Chinese presence in Tibet, making the immediate inference easy: Britain is to India as China is to Tibet, though perhaps tenses might be modified here. His decision to orient the critique in this fashion exemplifies what Venturino discusses of exiled Tibetans making use of their exile status. Norbu borrows from the

legacy of British imperialism in India, bringing up a classic colonialist example to support his depiction of a new form of colonialism. Norbu's position as an exile gives him a different set of tools with which to organize resistance to Chinese occupation, and his incorporation of a new Mookerjee into his text highlights both his outsider status as someone who has grown up in post-independence India and his ability to create bridges between two versions of colonialism. As a Tibetan exile seeking to build support for a critique of the Chinese presence in Tibet, Norbu mobilizes a story that the British (perhaps we might expand this to Anglophone countries generally) and many Indians would know; though we might interpret his text as external to actual events within Tibet, this does not prevent us from examining his text as part of the extended dialogue regarding his homeland. His text exists in a complex space despite its relatively simple narrative. Norbu's awareness of postcolonial revision strategies inform his novel, creating a loop in which postcolonial perspectives help understand an explicitly postcolonial novel.

If Norbu had only used Mookerjee to reinforce his arguments, perhaps we might be able to end with a discussion of *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* as a particularly fascinating example of a postcolonial revision, much like that of Basu above, but the second major character of the book—Holmes himself—forces us to reconsider this reading of the novel. Quite unlike the portrayal of Mookerjee, Holmes appears almost completely unaltered from his portrayal in the popular imagination, including nearly everything that identifies him for the audience. In a text that seems to embrace the postcolonial, the decision to leave Holmes “whole” raises a great many questions, as his presence seems to reinforce the presence of British authority itself; in essence, an

uncritiqued Holmes does not immediately fit the novel's established postcolonial goals. Lacking a fit with these other aspects of his text, we must begin to look for other ways in which the text uses the character of Conan Doyle's detective, beginning with a careful look at how Norbu presents and describes Holmes.

### **Holmes as Pastiche and Endorsement**

Written almost entirely from the perspective of Hurree Chunder Mookerjee, *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* gives the Bengali explorer the opportunity to provide the majority of the text's descriptions of Holmes. Interestingly, he has nothing but positive things to say about the detective. From the introduction, where Mookerjee describes Holmes using Watson's own phrasing as "a man whom I shall always regard as the best and wisest I have ever known" (xxiii), to the conclusion, where the detective's—and now lama's—"wise words" stay with the narrator forever (259), the text treats Conan Doyle's fictional creation with incredible reverence. Norbu's novel takes the great detective Sherlock Holmes on a very strange journey, beginning with a relatively standard mystery revolving around an assassination attempt on Holmes in Bombay, through a dangerous trip north to Simla, where Holmes begins to learn Tibetan, and then into Tibet, where Holmes discovers that not only is Moriarty alive and an evil Tibetan occultist, but that he himself is also a Tibetan occultist (albeit a good one) and must fight Moriarty to save the Dalai Lama and prevent a Chinese takeover of Tibet. In the epilogue, we find that Holmes-as-lama has been reincarnated and currently lives in Dharamsala with other exiled Tibetans. In assessing this whirlwind adventure, we can separate it into two overlapping components: the figuration of Holmes as a familiar character throughout his



travels and discoveries as well as the revelation that Holmes is a re-ensouled (but not initially reincarnated) Tibetan, the Gangsar *trulku*.

Though it may seem difficult to imagine, neither of these textual threads criticize Holmes's character or his beliefs, and the text relies upon the construction of a "familiar" or "proper" Holmes to make his incorporation into Tibet seem natural. Norbu's intertwined purposes do not immediately fit his pattern of criticizing the imperialist aims of China; to understand how they either enhance or detract from this work, we must begin by looking at what the text does with the character specifically. The book's dual treatment of its central characters is symptomatic of postcolonial subjects' complex relationship with colonialism and its legacies. Norbu's careful deployment of Holmes within the text invites a postmodern reading, as his use of Conan Doyle's character and much of the Victorian's narrative style is a careful pastiche, even though his text largely avoids the concerns laid out by Fredric Jameson's treatment of pastiche as the central, depthless postmodern style. We should be careful to separate Jameson's concept of pastiche as a postmodern strategy from the idea of pastiche as it is understood by Holmes scholars, for whom it largely means the transposition of the character and many character details into new stories outside of canonical representation. Though the pastiched elements of the novel as a Holmes copy suggest Jameson's "standard" postmodern pastiche in many ways, Norbu's text evades total categorization as a postmodern text by remaining largely uncritical of the detective it reimagines, and, echoing King more than Basu, this complex relationship with Sherlock Holmes exposes another way in which the character's legacy remains valuable when modified instead of rubbished.

## The Failures of Pastiche

The staunchest critic of pastiche as a technique is Fredric Jameson, who articulated many of his concerns with postmodern texts through a discussion of pastiche, which he identifies as its central practice. In his careful exploration of the postmodern aesthetic, part of the seminal *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991) he argues that the modernist critique of society—often performed through parodic representation of existing cultural situations and styles—was replaced by a free association of styles and contexts in postmodernism, a repetition and recombination without criticism he terms “pastiche.” This pastiche troubles Jameson because of its apparent lack of criticism and general sterility, insofar as it does not seem to generate new material, simply recycling the old in new arrangements without goal. He argues that postmodern texts are “depthless,” a play with surfaces that is in many ways attractive but lacks a goal or end—it is play for play’s sake, asserting that postmodernism’s lack of depth, “a new kind of superficiality in the most literal sense, [is] perhaps the supreme formal feature of all the postmodernisms” (9). For Jameson, the postmodern texts’ focus on repetition of material has become an end in itself, instead of looking for meaning within repetition. This distinction separates the parodic repetition of Modernism from pastiche, such that while “pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language,” it lacks “parody’s ulterior motives” (*Postmodernism* 17), performing its work without any kind of goal save pleasure.

Though Norbu creates a version of Holmes that is largely expected, canonical and pastiched, his claim for Holmes’s Tibetan roots indicates both a willingness to playfully challenge readers’ expectations and an awareness of the possibilities of a more parodic

take on the character; at the same time, the author's refusal to completely subvert and/or transform Holmes as he does in the case of Mookerjee in a continued postcolonial critique indicates that his goals are best served by keeping Holmes the same. Counter to Jameson's critique that pastiche has no "ulterior motives," Norbu's retention of a classic version of Holmes indicates that the character's biggest impact demands that he remain canonical. A traditional Holmes provides *The Mandala* room to emphasize the historical situation of Tibet—simplified as they are by the novel—instead of alterations to Holmes while also allowing Holmes's characteristics to enhance the book's claims about Tibet and China.

Norbu's treatment of Holmes qualifies as a pastiche in Jameson's terms only by the slimmest of margins. Certainly the first half of the text would seem to be a relatively straight-forward repetition of classic Holmes, relying as it does on traditional elements from the canon, such as the mystery-to-be-solved, the enigmatic investigation, and the narrator's position as Holmes's sidekick. The travel narrative that follows breaks the traditional mode slightly, but the revelation of Holmes as lama indicates Norbu's willingness to transform Holmes. However, the Tibetan lama underlying Holmes does not depart significantly from the character's popular construction. Norbu flirts with a more "parodic" reading in Jameson's sense, where the text has brought this familiar character to a point of crisis, and then backs away from imposing real change on the character after the moment has passed. He knows the power that a change in style or characterization can bring, demonstrated in large measure by his reconstruction of Mookerjee, but he chooses not to exercise that potential here. Alternately, Norbu's use of Mookerjee demonstrates his knowledge of parody's power, making his denial of that

power a deliberate choice that guides the reader toward a different set of claims being made by the text. Had he instead changed Holmes drastically, perhaps transforming him into a spiritual guide and dropping his skepticism and mannerisms, the text would necessarily focus on that change. The parody that he makes of Holmes's rationalism would be the centerpiece of the text. Instead, Norbu does not engage the reader in this manner, allowing his text to focus on convincing the readers of the illegality and immorality of China's presence in Tibet.

Though Jameson argues that pastiche contains no ulterior motive aside from the pleasure of seeing novel configurations of established styles and content, Norbu's text complicates this claim by using a pastiche in its figuration of Holmes to underscore a goal (convincing readers of Tibet's deserved independence) that the repetition of style and characterization does not impinge upon. Treating postmodern strategies as "pure play" dismisses the possibilities, political or subversive, that Norbu's text demonstrates. Surely the presence of Holmes as a central figure in this text helped to place it in the hands of readers who might not have otherwise come across literature about the relationship between Tibet and China, and thus the pastiche he uses directly supports the claims that Norbu wishes to advance regarding Tibet's sovereign status. In many ways, this is more effective than a simple polemic, as its status as a fiction helps to obscure its political undertones, painting China as an evil colonial power for an audience that may not know the full history of the area—or any history of the area, especially for Western audiences.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* exemplifies a critique of the absolutism inherent in Jameson's perspective, an evaluation that has been outlined elsewhere, including in John Duvall's "Troping History: Modernist Residue in Fredric Jameson's Pastiche and Linda Hutcheon's Parody." In his assault on Jameson's expectations for readers, Duvall calls out Jameson's high standards for effective parody, noting

In addition to the concealed politics behind the narrative, a fundamental power of the Sherlock Holmes story is its ability to walk a fine line between fiction and reality, and, though the texts work hard to remain tied to a certain kind of physical reality (as the previous chapter demonstrates), criticism of its failure to be fully truthful can be deflected by claiming that this is only a work of fiction. In this, Holmes narratives effectively both create a reality while defusing attempts to suggest that their reality is false or misleading, and Norbu relies on this to an extent when he presents a simplified version of Tibetan history as truth. He need not provide a nuanced version of the circumstances, as Holmes invariably presents a simpler version of the world for his readers in any case. Stepping away from Jameson and looking back over the text, its juxtaposition of historical events and details with an obviously fictional story suggests a different direction for analysis: the postmodern claim that we should understand history as a narrative as much as fictional texts, a position articulated effectively by Linda Hutcheon and discussed below.

#### Detective and Lama

*The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*'s reverence for its titular character appears clearly within the character's first encounter with the narrator. Mookerjee's superiors charge him with following a mysterious European's travels in Bombay, a Mr. Sigerson who is supposedly from Norway. Readers of Holmes may remember that Sigerson was

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the difficulty of imagining "what could ever ensure a reader's historiographic formation that Jameson requires before he will grant any political vocation to the contemporary historical novel" (372). For Jameson to see something as an effective parody instead of pastiche, readers must be educated enough to catch every reference and understand every allusion; Duvall argues that this appeals to some kind of impossible platonic reader and that parody—in the Jamesonian sense of repetition that critiques—can be found in contemporary, postmodern literature without recourse to impossibly ideal audiences. Duvall recognizes the limitations of Jameson's blanket dismissal of pastiche, and *The Mandala* echoes his concerns, providing another example of its use in the service of a larger argument.

the identity Holmes assumed after faking his death, according to Conan Doyle's "The Empty House." Additionally, Mookerjee's description of him standing with "his thin hawk-like nose" while "sucking on a pipe" leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that this is Holmes (Norbu 4). As though there were any remaining question of his identity, the detective demonstrates his amazing deductive skill in his first significant utterance to Mookerjee, correctly noting to Mookerjee that "You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive" (6). This statement unsettles the narrator, but readers are made to feel secure in their own deduction regarding the identity of "Sigerson"—the first of many satisfying intertextual moments the text provides the reader. Further, the reader sees that Mookerjee is this text's Watson stand-in, as the same assertion is first made about the good doctor in *A Study in Scarlet*. This comfort sits at the center of Norbu's presentation of Holmes, as there is little in the first half of the book that is meant to trouble readers' conception of the detective. His "surprising" deductions are no surprise to readers who have come to expect such things from him, and the text quickly delivers on this expectation.

Holmes's presence in Bombay does not go unnoticed by his enemies, and the very bloody death of a man at his hotel leads to an extended investigation into the manner of the man's death (a giant leech) as well as the motive (the assassination of Holmes). During this time, Holmes acts in what should be thought of as a consistent manner—that is, he acts as the reader expects him to act. In his investigation into the manner of the death, he clearly has theories that he does not share with Mookerjee, and instead instructs his guide to take him to the Natural History Society of Bombay, where the results of his research are left unstated. He sets a trap for the assassin, informing the local police where they should stay to catch the foe, but not explaining to them what he knows or why his

suggestions should be followed. All of this detection and withholding of information is “classic” Holmes, as throughout Conan Doyle’s original stories, Holmes would come up with a solution and invite Watson to follow along, though rarely explaining anything to his companion. In Norbu’s novel, Mookerjee takes on the Watson role and is told as little as the English doctor ever was; changing this would have been extremely off-putting for most Holmes aficionados because it would indicate to them that this particular version of a beloved character is not likely to act as expected—it is unsettling. The expectations brought by readers of intertextual pastiche can be crippling to authors, imposing limitations on what readers will accept from their beloved characters, but Norbu handles this issue well, incorporating not only the Conan Doyle stories but also the secondary materials that have become associated with Holmes.

The most important reference to the Conan Doyle texts comes from the care with which Norbu places Holmes’s travels in reference to the information provided by both “The Final Problem” and “The Empty House,” the stories where Holmes disappeared and returned, respectively. Holmes describes his fight with Moriarty at the Reichenbach Falls in detail during *The Mandala* (30-33), which was first written by Conan Doyle in “The Final Problem,” and his assumed identity of Sigerson comes directly from “The Empty House,” as does his brief note that he spent “some days with the grand Lama” (*New Annotated Stories* 794). Norbu’s inclusion of these details creates a sense of security for readers familiar with the canonical detective who will relax as their expectations are realized. The text does not stop with references to the Conan Doyle originals, however, as Norbu provides references to material that has accumulated around and after the stories. For instance, as previously noted in chapters one and two, the deerstalker cap which

Holmes is often associated with is never mentioned in the canonical texts, appearing in illustration (by Sidney Paget) primarily before becoming part of his “standard” outfit in films and television, but Norbu includes it as an important component of the detective’s traveling gear (40). Further, when Holmes shocks Mookerjee yet again by appearing to read his thoughts, he follows an explanation of how he knew what his companion was thinking with a paraphrase of his oft-repeated phrase: “Elementary, my dear Hurree” (145). As noted in the first chapter, Holmes’s phrase is more commonly known as “Elementary, my dear Watson” and stems from a stage play by William Hooker Gillette. Norbu demonstrates his familiarity with the canonical detective here, but he illustrates that he is more interested in the cultural image of Holmes, the version that has accreted into its form over the course of the twentieth century; it is perhaps also worth noting that this vision of Holmes is certainly “British” but has few if any colonialist connotations. These components of Holmes’s character in *The Mandala* are not “canonical” in the sense of being directly from Conan Doyle’s stories and novels, but they contribute to a sense of “continuity of character” for the audience. Few readers are familiar enough with the minutiae of Sherlock Holmes trivia to know that he never says his most famous line in the canon, and fewer still would think of the deerstalker as an element from outside of Conan Doyle’s texts, but Norbu clearly desires to invoke the *idea* of Holmes as much as the canonical construction of the character. Trying to please both audiences of Holmes aficionados and those with casual knowledge of the character is difficult, but Norbu’s careful canonical awareness helps assuage fears of the first category and his willingness to present the popularized version helps engage the second. Norbu’s inclusion of these



components continues the work of convincing both audiences that they know what to expect from their main character.

All of that work toward establishing continuity appears to be undone rather dramatically approximately mid-way through the book, when truly mystical things begin to occur, starting with the death of one of the Dalai Lama's guardians who is killed by a magically levitated and flung sword (170). Magic, especially of the kind that remains magical after Holmes's critical examination, does not exist in the canon, which presents an exclusively secular and empiricist detective, reliant entirely on reason and deduction. Things take an even stranger turn when Holmes confronts the character who caused this, the Dark One, and learns that he is actually an old nemesis, Moriarty (195). The text begins to seem utterly inconsistent with canonical representations of Holmes when the Lama Yonten tells him "You are not Sherlock Holmes, you are the renowned Gangsar *trulku*...one of the greatest adepts of the occult sciences. The Dark One slew you eighteen years ago, but just before your life-force left your body we were able to transfer it to another body far away" (241, emphasis in original). The careful groundwork laid by Norbu weakens with these revelations; all of the efforts made to comfort the reader and meet their expectations are dashed by these shifts in character. Had Holmes truly been a Tibetan occultist all along, one expects that Conan Doyle would have said so in his tales, and this construction forces the reader to consider Holmes in a new light, challenging what had been a faithful representation of the character up to this point.

Norbu knows that this moment presents a great problem to readers bearing prior expectations for Holmes; thus, instead of simply dropping these revelations on them without preparation, he provides significant groundwork for this change. Even before

Holmes appears, Norbu anticipates this transformation in a carefully chosen epigraph taken from Conan Doyle's story "The Retired Colourman." Holmes laments "Is not all life pathetic and futile? ... We reach. We grasp. And what is left in our hands at the end? A shadow. Or worse than a shadow—misery" (v). The detective's morbidity stands alongside a quote from Detlef Ingo Lauf's *Tibetan Sacred Art* describing the Tibetan Mandala as "a sacred circle surrounded by light rays or the place purified of all transitory or dualist ideas...[it is] the centre of all existence" (v), thereby connecting Holmes's declaration of life's meaninglessness with a search for meaning elsewhere—perhaps in Tibetan philosophy. Norbu continues to build a case for Holmes's interest in the metaphysical through discussions with Mookerjee, one of which ends with Holmes's observation that "...all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known whenever we are shown a single link of it" (146). Clarifying the importance of this statement, Norbu inserts himself into the narrative with a footnote for the reader: "Holmes expresses something very similar in his article 'The Book of Life,' which Watson mentions...in *A Study in Scarlet*...it is remarkable that neither Watson nor the generations of Holmesian scholars should have noticed [this] clear spiritual bent" (146).<sup>7</sup> His efforts here indicate both an awareness of the difficulty he faces in convincing Holmes's fans of his Tibetan identity and a great skill in providing an alternate path for said readers. In bringing up canonical examples of Holmes's "spiritual bent," Norbu opens the door for rereading Holmes in a new way, demanding that his audience consider the possibility that the detective's ruthlessly rational approach to the world conceals a desire to find something beyond it. He tempers this claim by retaining Holmes's characteristic attitudes and

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<sup>7</sup> Conan Doyle's own interest in spiritualism is likely at play here, and the disjunction between his detective's disdain for the supernatural and his own willingness to believe it is sometimes rather shocking. However, as Norbu notes, there are hints of interest in the supernatural in Holmes as well.

skepticism, and in the face of these revelations the text recognizes in Holmes the features held in common with other lamas (242). Holmes's physical characteristics are reasserted (244), and his skepticism regarding myth and superstition is restated (255). Despite the change that Norbu imposes upon Holmes, the text insists that he remains much the same as before, presenting him as expected by his admirers.

Some readers may not accept this change in Holmes, but none could argue that Norbu's claim for Holmes' interest in the spiritual is unfounded when confronted with the evidence from the text. The detective is rational, certainly, but the evidence Norbu provides for a latent metaphysical drive behind this rationality, motivating it, cannot be entirely ignored. Whether the text convinces readers of Holmes's "true" identity or not, the author clearly does not wish to completely subvert the character of Holmes; the groundwork he lays for the change and the text's presentation of post-revelation Holmes as equivalent to his pre-revelation identity indicates the importance of keeping the great detective fundamentally unchanged. Norbu's novel relies on a largely canonical Holmes, and changing him would frustrate readers' expectations significantly—something the author clearly does not wish to do. This lack of change can certainly be interrogated from a postcolonial viewpoint, as it implies that certain characterizations are more worthy of challenge and revision than others; in the case of Sherlock Holmes, he may be of more value relatively unchanged. By including Holmes without irretrievably altering him, by relying upon the culturally accepted tropes and writing style associated with him, and by returning to a century-old character without a sense of critique, Norbu brings up the specter of pointless play, empty stylistic fun. Including a character like Holmes and demanding that he remain true to his "canonical" self would seem to defeat the purpose

of exploring his character; if there is nothing new to say, finding reasons for using the character is not easily done. However, the point of including this pastiche of Holmes does not lie in changing him, despite what critics of pastiche might argue.

### Politicized Postmodern History

The central poles around which *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* organizes itself are the detective's presence in Tibet and the historical relationship between Tibet and China, particularly at the end of the nineteenth century. Norbu's choice to locate his story in this time period may seem straightforward, given his protagonist and his obvious interest in fitting into the canonical "life" of the character, but the decision nonetheless remains interesting from a postmodern perspective. His pastiche of Holmes may not seem particularly critical, but according to Linda Hutcheon and her vision of critical, politicized postmodernism, the point of such pastiche is not necessarily to criticize the creations of the past but rather to put them into contact with history, thereby interrogating the validity of historical "facts." She acknowledges that uncritical pastiches exist, but she wishes to reconstruct parody within postmodernism, picking up the idea of the "motivated" recreation and arguing that "parody is a particularly apt representational strategy for postmodernism" (*Politics of Postmodernism* 113). In contrast to Jameson's claim that postmodernism relies exclusively on uncritical pastiche, Hutcheon sees in certain postmodern texts a critical perspective that others lack, a group of texts she calls "historiographic metafiction." For Hutcheon, these texts ask "us to recall that history and fiction are themselves historical terms and that their definitions and interrelations are historically determined and vary with time" (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 105). Although Norbu's text superficially resembles Hutcheon's definition of a politically-minded,

effective postmodernism, it resists this categorization in the end and gestures toward a different goal for its pastiche. Her explanation of this particular variety of postmodern literature, based largely on Julia Kristeva's theorizations regarding the efficacy of postmodernism, does not encapsulate Norbu's text because *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* purposefully inverts the order she proposes, using fiction to support a "true" history. The novel presents a different way of perceiving the relationship between fiction and literature, and placing fiction alongside history paradoxically makes the history *more* real in *The Mandala*, in large part because of Norbu's choice of pastiche and the text's postcolonial goals.

Norbu's novel puts a fictional story into direct contact with a particularly contentious historical period. While the narrative of Holmes's arrival in India and travel to Tibet serves as a postmodern pastiche of classic Conan Doyle narratives, the text pairs this with a series of carefully constructed history lessons, generally provided by Mookerjee and the other characters Holmes encounters, all of which provides Holmes and the reader the information needed to understand the dangers of the Chinese presence in Tibet. For Hutcheon, such a scenario would present an opportunity for an author to create "historiographic metafiction" by using the narrative of Holmes's journey to question any assumption that the historical information provided by any text is "true." She describes this action in her book *The Politics of Postmodernism*:

Works like Coover's *The Public Burning* or Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* do not rewrite, refashion, or expropriate history merely to satisfy either some game-playing or totalizing impulse; instead, they juxtapose what we think we know of the past...with an alternate representation that foregrounds the postmodern epistemological questioning of the nature of historical knowledge. Which 'facts' make it into history? And *whose* facts? (68, emphasis hers)

The useful work done by Hutcheon's politicized postmodernism involves this "questioning of the nature of historical knowledge," wherein the fiction exposes the narrative-ness of history. Her argument rests on the idea that there was certainly something that happened in the past, but our subjectivity and drive to narrate bind our ability to understand just exactly what it might have been.

The politics of this come directly out of Julia Kristeva's early work with intertextuality as a critique of modernist textual relations, particularly her book *Desire in Language*. In this, she makes the claim that an inter-relationship between texts, including fiction and history as well as texts known by the author and those brought by the reader, produces textual meaning. She describes the text as

a *productivity*, and this means: first, that its relationship to the language in which it is situated is redistributive (destructive-constructive), and hence can be better approached through logical categories rather than linguistic ones; and second, that it is a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another. (36)

The author creates a text made up of "several utterances" taken from prior experiences, which may say something new but cannot help but consist of information and configurations experienced elsewhere. The reader understands the text not as the author intended, but as a function of its interaction with the "several utterances" they bring to it. A reader experiences all written material as a text (and perhaps all experiences, broadly speaking, qualify as texts), such that historical, political, fictional, non-fictional and any other category of writing must be treated in the same manner. In his exploration of her work William Irwin argues that Kristeva's position regarding these texts fits into a larger political agenda that seeks "to redistribute power. The method of reading that intertextuality provides is meant as a model for political and social action and change"

(section IV paragraph 3). His reading clarifies the importance of recognizing that “society and history are not elements external to textuality...[they] are themselves texts, and so are already and unavoidably inside the textual system” (section II paragraph 4).

Recognizing that the textuality of history shifts power from the authors who produce history to the readers that interpret it, thereby stripping the discipline of its status as a purveyor of truth, is a potent move and the basis of Hutcheon’s rehabilitation of postmodern writing. Her historiographic metafiction modifies and extends Kristeva’s intertextuality, expanding its radical politics into the realm of pastiche, allowing it a parodic goal. A historical pastiche that exposes the totalizing impulse of historical narratives to readers fits her criteria quite well, yet *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* avoids this work to instead reinforce the positivist, nationalist beliefs of Tibetan sovereignty.

Norbu’s novel not only avoids questioning the history it presents to the reader, it *needs* this history to remain static so that it can make its claim for Chinese imperialism. Hutcheon’s “Epistemological questioning” does not provide support for this concern because it opens up the possibility that its presentation of Chinese imperialism in the nineteenth century is not accurate, that it is merely one particular thread of history chosen from many. The desired impact of Norbu’s text is the reader’s recognition of Tibetan independence, and the text works toward this by relying on an “innocent” history of Tibet before Holmes and then preventing him from poking holes in the stories provided by the characters. The history could have easily come under careful scrutiny from Holmes, who need only have asked a few questions about the origins of the Chinese presence in Tibet at the time to stir the possibility of contested historical narratives in the reader’s mind.

When first told by Mookerjee that the “army of the Emperor Yung-Chang entered Thibet at the beginning of the last century,” after which “the Manchu throne has claimed certain suzerain rights in Thibet” (Norbu 92), Holmes might have inquired about the circumstances of this entry and the nature of this suzerainty, but he does not do so. The text does not “juxtapose what we think we know of the past...with an alternate representation” as Hutcheon’s definition requires—perhaps because the text assumes that the reader brings little or any information about Tibetan history to the text—nor does it provide competing readings for an audience to vacillate between. Instead, *The Mandala* presents a single vision of Tibetan history and its relationship with the Chinese, giving the reader little room to disagree.

The novel’s approach to history provides an interesting counterpoint for Hutcheon’s politicized postmodernism. In essence, Hutcheon suggests that the pairing of a critical fiction with a historical narrative can do the work Kristeva saw in intertextuality: questioning the validity of totalizing historical narratives. This critical fiction can take the form of a repetition of prior styles and characterizations, though she sees this reprise as retaining the parodic function Jameson locates in modernist fiction without dropping back into the uncritical pastiche he mistrusts. Norbu’s text pairs a fiction with a historical narrative, though the critical interrogation of this narrative is absent and the fiction works to *support* the history it accompanies. The text’s inversion of Hutcheon’s historiographic metafiction invites concern over the efficacy of its critical work, as an inversion of the work could indicate an equivalent reversal of the text’s politics. In the case of *The Mandala*, the inversion of Hutcheon’s framework indicates only a different political end, not a denial of the importance of politics or political action.



Just as Jameson's criticism of pastiche does not completely encapsulate Norbu's use of Holmes, Hutcheon's claim for the critical potential of postmodern writing does not effectively define the relationship between fiction and history in the text. The text's approach to Holmes fits the definition of pastiche far better than a critical revision (such as that of Mookerjee), and it uses this "innocent" vision of the detective to support a static vision of history.

### **Truth and History in Fiction**

In my above discussion regarding the importance of establishing Tibet's historical independence from China, I relied upon Tibet scholar John Powers's explanation of the stakes for Tibetan exiles. Implicit in that quote but more obvious in the title of his book, *History as Propaganda*, one of the central problems of any attempt to *prove* Tibet's independence is its near impossibility. Interpretations of the historical events and even the events themselves are disputed on both sides of the controversy, and each side's presentation of the 'history' of Tibet quickly becomes propagandistic; neither side can *prove* their case. In his outline of the situation,

Tibetan histories generally construct a narrative in which China played at most a peripheral role until the mid-twentieth century, while Chinese sources paint a picture of Tibet in which the region was completely under the administrative and political control of various Chinese central governments from at least the thirteenth century and in which Tibetan culture is largely derived from China. (4)

Both sides use similar historical documents, though the analysis of each document supports whichever side is reading it; as expected, there is little agreement between the two. Powers is not the only author to explore this issue, as Anne-Marie Blondeau and Katia Buffetrille's *Authenticating Tibet: Answers to China's 100 Questions* (2008) investigates the "100 Questions" posed by the People's Republic of China that interrogate

belief in Tibetan independence. *Authenticating Tibet* relies on international Tibetan scholars to show that while many of China's assertions are unfounded, there is significant truth to some of their arguments—a finding parallel to Powers' text. Neither side can claim that their position is more 'true' than the other, despite belief that "'history' can prove their points and defeat their enemies" (Powers 159). The extraordinary difficulty, if not outright impossibility, of history's ability to 'prove' the truth of this relationship is clear, perhaps in echo of the postmodern recognition of the totalizing historical narrative.

*The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* uses its titular character partly in avoidance of this very concern, relying upon the Holmes narrative to simplify the debate and shift focus away from any competing claims about Tibet. The world of Sherlock Holmes consists of the just and the unjust, with no room for shades of grey between; its epistemological certainty regarding concepts like good and bad, law-breaker and law-upholder lends itself wonderfully to a story in which one side is heroic, like its underdog Tibetans, and the other side is antagonistic, like its scheming Chinese. Furthermore, the absence of 'grey areas' in the narrative becomes associated with Holmes and not with any attempt to hide material. Holmes' relationship with the truth contributes to this effect, as his certainly fictional stories contain significant amounts of realistic detail and logical (if often highly implausible) explanations of how crimes were accomplished. Readers of Holmes texts are accustomed to encountering new information within the stories and then being able to rely upon that information, as discussed in the previous chapter. Readers of Holmes expect the world of his stories to roughly correspond to the real world, which places Norbu's inclusion of Tibetan independence into the "real world" in much the same way as the material in other Holmes stories. Despite his status as a fictional character,

Holmes's strong association with reality helps the text's arguments seem less argumentative and more realistic.

In an essay on Holmes' cultural value and impact, Christopher Clausen asserts that "few characters in all of literature are as widely known as Sherlock Holmes" (104), that he is the most "real" character in Victorian fiction. In a very powerful and troubling way, Holmes is likely more real to many readers of *The Mandala* than the difficulties of the Tibetan people; it seems logical to assume that more people are familiar with the character of Holmes than know significant details regarding the Chinese occupation of Tibet—or even less likely, any of the Chinese claims regarding their authority over Tibet. Even more worrisome, given the difficulties of establishing consensus on the historical reality of Tibet, Holmes' somewhat complex history is incredibly simple and easier to follow in comparison. Establishing the 'truths' of Holmes' life and times seems a shockingly simple task in comparison with sorting through the morass of information about Tibet and China. Between the audience's awareness of Holmes as a character and cultural touchstone and the difficulties of understanding the controversy surrounding Tibet's historical status, the reader is placed in a position to easily assume that Holmes' adventures consist of the truth. Ultimately, his fictional presentation of the situation trumps reality in both simplicity and access.

The interlocking relationship between both Holmes's prior characterization and narrative structure as well as Norbu's desire to simplify an incredibly complex situation is extremely clever, suiting Norbu's goals perfectly and setting the reader up to agree with the author's presentation of the material without considering the possibility that he

might be misrepresenting facts. In his analysis of the Tibetan exile community's strategies for convincing others of their claims, Powers notes that it

has become increasingly sophisticated and adaptive in its use of the international media and in the production and dissemination of its version of Tibetan history. The history war it wages with China is as unequal in the Tibetan's favor as the military one that was fought in the 1950's, which China won easily. (158)

Chinese attempts to convince others of their claim's rightness tend to rely upon direct historical appeals, according to Powers. These appeals and analyses are convincing, but they run up against the Tibetan exile community's similar efforts, which tend to cancel each other out. The exile community does not limit itself to pure historical analysis, and Norbu's novel exemplifies their creative tactics. His use of Holmes to create a narrative that implicitly forces readers to agree with his position is shrewd and effective, but the efficacy of his claim improves even further as other aspects of Holmes' character are considered.

The relationship between Holmes and truth enhances Norbu's ability to advance his argument to the reader, though Norbu also builds effective links between some of Holmes' other characteristics and Tibet. Enhancing the connection philosophically, Holmes' careful observations, focus on logic and reasoning and skepticism are all shown to be part of Tibetan thinking as well. Supporting his claim for Tibetan independence, Norbu's decision to transfer Holmes' nationality to Tibet implies that Tibet itself is a sovereign nation with its own citizens, while also transferring the nationalism implied by the detective's actions in England. These two characteristics further enhance the connection between an independent Tibet and Holmes, even if not in the same way that his relationship with truth supports Norbu's assertions. These secondary associations

further cement the claims that Norbu makes, once again relying on classic depictions of Holmes and readers' knowledge of the character to gain them as allies.

That logic and rational deduction are a central component of Sherlock Holmes' character seems too obvious to mention, but Norbu manipulates this aspect of Holmes to make his transition to Tibetan national more acceptable to his audience. His deductive abilities are put on display early in the book, from his first analysis of Mookerjee discussed above to the mystery he solves before heading north to Tibet. During this journey, Mookerjee discusses the Brahmo Somajist beliefs that tie his learning to a source outside of Western paradigms of knowledge acquisition, but this information has a dual role: informing the reader that modes of thinking and inquiries about the world exist outside of the West. Watching as he works through a particularly difficult analysis, Mookerjee notes that Holmes does not eat when he focuses his powers of observation and likens this to the meditation that "certain Buddhist and Hindu teachings consider...a great spur to the intellect" (Norbu 202); Norbu footnotes Holmes's behavior as something "Watson also mention[ed]" (218). The text takes pains to establish that this behavior existed in the Conan Doyle originals while allowing Mookerjee to link intense concentration with fasting, connecting what might seem a secular activity with a religious one that the Tibetan monks recognize and support (Norbu 202). The apex of these associations between Holmes and Tibetan thinking appears in a conversation between Holmes and the young Dalai Lama, in which the two discuss the plausibility of the detective's disguise and Holmes acknowledges the boy's observational powers (Norbu 183), thereby establishing a continuity between their approaches to the world. This moment stands alongside many others in the text, all of which work to establish a

philosophical parity between Holmes and Tibet. *The Mandala*'s agenda of linking the two ensures that the reader will see Tibet as a legitimate possible home for Holmes, a space capable of producing a thinker like the great detective, a region deserving of the respect and admiration Holmes gives it—ideally culminating in the reader giving it the same respect.

Naturalizing Holmes' incorporation into Tibet helps the text's audience accept the transition, and though this is necessary, it supports Norbu's claim for Tibetan independence only indirectly. Of significantly more use is Holmes' connection to the idea of nationalism, both in terms of his (indirect) support of the British state and the consequences his actions as a detective imply. Though it has always been Mycroft, Holmes' older brother, who worked directly for the British government, Holmes often did work for the government, as in Conan Doyle's final story in which the detective helps ferret out a German spy on the eve of World War I ("His Last Bow" 1917). Despite his infrequent assistance to the crown, Christopher Clausen argues that Holmes, as an icon, represents law and order for the British Empire; additionally, though he does not always turn his great intellect on the sources of Victorian social problems, he serves as a support for them (Clausen 115-116). In this reading, Holmes' work as an explicit government agent and crime-stopper both work to support the status quo of the British government; the laws he upholds are British, and his lack of critique regarding the application of these laws shows an implicit acceptance of the nation as an unqualified good. Clausen argues that Holmes' lack of interest in the social ills that lead to crime are a problem for the character as a positive icon, but this complex view of the character still recognizes the support he provides the state.

This forms part of the danger Jameson sees in uncritical pastiche, as by accepting Holmes as-is, Norbu includes all of the problematic assumptions that underpin the detective's work. A problematic conservatism sits at the heart of Holmes' nationalism, the very thing that Jameson notes as a difficulty; thus, bringing in Holmes without critiquing his origins has significant consequences for Norbu's project. Importing Holmes' nationalism also introduces a belief in the nation as arbiter of social interaction and places its defense at the pinnacle of each citizen's priorities—not that Norbu necessarily has a problem with this. While these things are the hallmarks of a more conservative vision of the nation, the time period into which Norbu projects them would be unlikely to accommodate much else—and in truth nearly any association of Tibet with nationalism serves his project. It does not matter that the idea of nation-ness and national service are not progressive here; the important issue is the recognition that turn-of-the-century Tibet had the qualities of a nation, making the later Chinese occupation an invasion of a sovereign power.

Once Norbu does the work of associating Holmes with Tibet philosophically, his revelation that the detective is Tibetan appears significantly more believable, and the removal of the British focus of Holmes' national service allows the association of this now rootless nationalism with another space: Tibet. Norbu's text not only convinces the reader to oppose the Chinese occupation, it also convinces the reader that Tibet is a nation deserving of the same respect as Great Britain. The characteristics of this fictional character support Norbu's desires in almost every respect, and his ability to effectively apply them demonstrates an incredibly careful and well-conceived strategy for manipulating the reader's alliances. *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* thus represents a

fascinating use of general cultural awareness in the service of a specific message, employing an audience's knowledge of and connection to a well-known character to manipulate them into agreeing with an argument quite separate from the character's concerns.

The separation of the national from the colonial allows Norbu to use Holmes as a functional defender of Tibet's claims for sovereignty. If Holmes exists as both nationalist and colonialist, then the logic that allowed Britain to control their colonies remains in place; however, if Norbu avoids showing Holmes as supportive of the colonization project, then his confirmation of Tibet's nationhood is possible. As with the presentation of Tibetan/Chinese historical interactions previously, this avoids the possibility that the thought processes that support nation-building are inherently also colonialist, but Norbu is not interested in presenting a more complex presentation here. Sherlock Holmes resolves complexities—even at the formal level of narrative construction—making an attempt to present such irreducible paradoxes an anathema to the Holmes style. Had Norbu done so, his text would be entirely different and likely far closer to Basu's critique of the detective's simplifications. Instead, the Tibetan-in-exile created a version of Holmes that relied on his canonical characteristics to help maintain and extend a popular vision of Tibet as a colonized but resilient people and nation. And in doing so, Norbu demonstrates that the canonical Holmes retains characteristics that, when deployed effectively, are useful despite his age—or perhaps paradoxically, because of it. Coming at the end of the nineteenth century, Holmes fills a certain role as a producer of what it means to be British, and Norbu cleverly reappropriates this to demonstrate what it means to be Tibetan.



Norbu's text may appear simple and straight-forward in many ways, but the overlap between criticized postmodern technique and complex postcolonial goals opens the door for us to envision the possibilities of using well-known persistent fictions in new contexts, seeing the value of the text's repetitious use of Holmes in a new light. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes is not exactly the same as Norbu's, but their similarities are greater than their differences in the end—and the parallels between them create a space in which the reader can engage and agree with Norbu's claims comfortably. *The Mandala of Sherlock Holmes* demonstrates how a postcolonial goal can be achieved using a variation on postmodern pastiche and suggests that other texts may engage in similar work.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ADVENTURE OF THE DISABILITY DESCRIPTION

Toward the end of the summer of 2012, after the second season of Stephen Moffat and Mark Gatiss's BBC series *Sherlock* (2010-present) had aired and Holmes seemed to be on everyone's minds, literature and psychology scholar Maria Konnikova had had enough. A lifelong reader of Conan Doyle's stories, she wrote a short article describing her frustrations about current descriptions of the great detective. "I'd like to get something off my chest," she begins. "It's been bugging me for a very, very long time. Sherlock Holmes is not a sociopath" (Konnikova). Clearly reacting in large measure to the BBC *Sherlock*, in which Holmes self-diagnoses as a "high-functioning sociopath," Konnikova decided to refute the show's popularization of this misconception, and in her essay she very thoroughly demonstrates that the character cannot fit the established, medical definition of the sociopath or psychopath—which are "the exact same thing" she declares—by combing through the character's actions in Conan Doyle's stories and finding significant exclusionary evidence. After reading her evidence, it is clear that "Sherlock Holmes is not a cold, calculating, self-gratifying machine. He cares for Watson. He cares for Mrs. Hudson. He most certainly has a conscience" (Konnikova), all of which makes it impossible for him to also be a sociopath, q.e.d.

Her argument is hard to refute, but its reliance upon the canonical stories puts it slightly out of step with the show against which it argues. Her canon-based strategy marks her as a Conan Doyle purist—a perfectly acceptable position to hold—though in making such a conservative argument she places herself in opposition to the

preponderance of Holmes narratives in recent years. When she notes that she has had this concern regarding the mischaracterization (perhaps misdiagnosis) of the detective “for a very, very long time” and later expresses her surprise that “he has been termed psychopathic so often—and so uncontestedly” (para. 5), she implies that this is an ongoing problem wherein readers have uncritically accepted a version of the character that is not “authentic.” But this argument does not acknowledge the possibility that such a reformulation of the character, one that recognizes and magnifies certain characteristics present in the canon (as she notes), exists not as a critique of Conan Doyle’s creation but as an adaptation of him for a new audience. It is a revision, and as such it is perhaps implicitly a challenge to Conan Doyle, or more specifically, the continued relevance of an unaltered Holmes.<sup>1</sup> In the change that so frustrates Konnikova there is the kernel of a shift in cultural engagement, an interest in minds that operate outside the norm, brought on in no small part by the promotion and expansion of psychology as a valid discipline throughout the twentieth century. In a manner quite similar to Laurie King’s Mary Russell books and Jamyang Norbu’s *Mandala of Sherlock Holmes*, texts like the BBC’s *Sherlock* series amplify the psychological difference of the character, and these amplifications have struck a chord in audiences. Konnikova’s questions about the legitimacy of non-canonical visions seem far less useful than an investigation into the nature of this interest; this chapter will serve as a starting point for that investigation.

Before this investigation begins, however, the somewhat superficial practice of “diagnosing” literary characters and historical figures deserves brief mention. This

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<sup>1</sup> Konnikova may have a vested interest in Doyle’s Holmes as a thinker in part due her recent book *Mastermind: How to Think Like Sherlock Holmes* (2013); if the character’s abilities stem from sociopathy—or another physical brain difference—thinking like the detective becomes an impossibility for those lacking this difference.

chapter does not intend to provide a diagnosis for Sherlock Holmes or any other fictional or historical individual—canonical or otherwise. Though spirited debates regarding a variety of proposed diagnoses for historical figures (did Napoleon have a narcissistic personality disorder?) and characters from classic literature (how much of an Oedipus complex did Hamlet have?) were once quite popular, there has been little if any serious attention given to such claims in recent years. Serious discussion of psychological diagnoses and disability issues will appear here in this project, but assertions regarding the mental states of characters as they relate to specific conditions and disorders will come from the texts themselves—either explicitly, in the case of *Sherlock*, or implicitly, as in the case of *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (2003). The material below investigates Sherlock Holmes’s participation in complex dialogues regarding the increasing variety of mental states and psychological conditions—what we might broadly refer to as neurodiversity; this chapter does not attempt to offer diagnoses but instead to understand what interest in different kinds of minds demonstrates.

This chapter will explore the inclusion of Conan Doyle’s creation as a part of discussions of mental disability, arguing that these texts rely upon augmentation of canonical characteristics—incredible logical ability and anti-social attitudes primarily—to intervene in culture-defining debates about the value of different kinds of minds. Beginning with the dramatic decision to put Holmes on the sociopathy spectrum in *Sherlock*, the first section will outline shifts in cultural texts featuring psychopaths and the difficulty of recognizing the disorder as a range and not a singular condition. From this basis, the second discussion will provide an understanding of this particular presentation of sociopathy through the lens of disability studies, recognizing in Moffat

and Gatiss's show a twist on expectations for stories of contained difference. The third and final section tracks the detective into Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time*, wherein he appears as a way of approaching and understanding autism. Throughout this chapter, Holmes participates in what Thomas Armstrong recognizes as the "need to reject the 'disease-based' thinking that too often dogs the lives of labeled individuals [and to] embrace a more positive vision of who they are, and who they can become"; for Armstrong, that name for that concept is "neurodiversity," which "conveys a sense of the richness of different kinds of brains" (viii). While Conan Doyle may have never considered the possibility that his detective was mentally other, contemporary knowledge of psychology and neurology has made such inferences possible and allowed new authors to continue making Sherlock Holmes relevant.

The following material will extend discussions begun in prior chapters, though instead of exploring shifts in Holmes's gendered beliefs or interrogating his role as supporter of the nation-state, it recognizes current interest in mental difference as concerned with the sources of knowledge and not the knowledge itself. This postmodern concern with the subjective and thus limited nature of awareness and understanding appears here in popular literature, but the use of Holmes to explore the concern highlights the continuing conflict between the need for a certain level of assurance and the impossibility of total certainty; the detective can use logic and deduction and does so quite effectively, but his situated identity—and now neurological otherness—make this determination more problematic than in years (and texts) past. Here again the detective faces critique of a fundamental kind, but instead of simply suggesting that the character is no longer useful or that his reliance upon empirical observation and deductive reasoning

is outdated and unnecessary, these texts continue to rely on a heroic presentation of Holmes. They acknowledge his weaknesses but, in their sustained support, maintain that we still need him. Though this may be unwise, potentially limiting imagination and expectation, these texts maintain and extend the “genre” of Sherlock Holmes.

### **Investigating the Detective’s Mind**

Aired first in July of 2010, Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss’s television show *Sherlock*, featuring “a thrilling contemporary version” of Conan Doyle’s original stories (“Sherlock”), later appeared on the Public Broadcasting Service in the United States in October of the same year. This “contemporary vision” involves a blogging Watson and a texting Holmes, and is thus a technological update alongside its other alterations; but unlike narratives that create new plots for the twenty-first century setting, *Sherlock* adapts and modifies Conan Doyle’s original material in the same way that it changes the characters. Its initial episode, “A Study in Pink,” refers to the title of Conan Doyle’s first Holmes text, *A Study in Scarlet*, and uses many of the devices and details from that original story, including the method of murders under investigation (poisoning through a game of pill selection), clues (such as a word written near a dead body), and various other minor details besides. It diverges from Conan Doyle’s original quite sharply in other respects, avoiding both a narrative flashback to pioneers in the United States and Conan Doyle’s negative portrayal of the Mormon religion; in place of this, Watson and Holmes investigate a series of apparent suicides—murders, once carefully examined—and discover a serial killer cab driver whose terminal illness goads him into killing others. In re-telling the story of Watson’s first meeting with Holmes and their first case, “A Study in Pink” puts tremendous emphasis on Holmes’s eccentricities, going so far as to have

police officers label him a psychopath, while also creating a mental illness for Watson and placing the villain's mindset perilously parallel to Holmes's. These emphases create a version of the character that opens discussions of neurodiversity and mental illness—a set of concerns without equivalent in Conan Doyle's time.

The Moffat and Gatiss vision of a non-neurotypical Holmes is not the first time that the character has been associated with diagnoses of mental illness. Chapter two's discussion of Nicholas Meyer's *The Seven Per-Cent Solution* provides clear evidence for Holmes's association with addiction, and within Conan Doyle's original stories Watson recognizes this tendency as well. After combing the canon for indicative evidence, prominent Holmes scholar Leslie Klinger "favors a diagnosis of bipolar disorder, pointing to the detective's swings between hyperactivity and lassitude" (Sanders para. 7), while acknowledging other readers' suggestion "that Sherlock Holmes may have had a mild form of autism, commonly known as Asperger's syndrome" (para. 8). *New York Times* author Lisa Sanders tends toward this opinion, providing a careful explanation of how such a diagnosis is likely relying heavily upon the canon. The non-canonical extrapolations of James Goldman's play and film adaptation of *They Might Be Giants* (play 1961, film 1971) made Holmes the alter-ego of a grieving husband who fixates onto his psychologist, Dr. Watson of course, and attempts to evade authorities seeking to reincarcerate him. In Robert Doherty's CBS television show *Elementary* (2012-present), Holmes is a recovering drug addict with whom Dr. Watson is paired, initially to ensure his continued sobriety but rapidly as a partner in crime-solution. But despite all these various associations, speculations, and tangential relations with mental difference, Moffat

and Gatiss's show is the only one that both places Holmes's neurological situation at the center of their adaptation and presents it as a difference that cannot be overcome.

Setting aside *They Might Be Giants* as an outlier, given that the protagonist believes himself to be Holmes but is not the great detective throughout the text, the vast majority of Holmes encounters with mental illness revolve around his drug addiction. This makes excellent sense as an extension of the canonical tales and provides a narrative in which Holmes can overcome a problem—or perhaps at least in which he has another foe to fight against. The structure of this fight against addiction will reappear in the discussion of disability below, as will the belief that he may be suffering from Asperger's syndrome, but it is not the primary component of *Sherlock*. Instead of a narrative of mental disease that can be overcome through hard work and diligence,<sup>2</sup> the BBC show presents a version of the detective whose situation, though it includes a suggestion of drug use, is substantially less alterable. The decision for Holmes to self-describe as a “high-functioning sociopath” is thus a fundamentally important choice in terms of the nature of the condition, its presentation as a culturally “understood” disorder, and the narrative of disability into which it projects the character.

The presentation of the detective's diagnosis provides a useful context with which to begin this exploration, and the position of the assertion within the first episode of the series establishes not only its importance but its continuing impact on audience expectations for the character and his interactions with the world. A pastiche both of Holmes broadly as well as the first of Conan Doyle's texts featuring the detective, Moffat

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<sup>2</sup> The narrative of substance dependence as an illness that can be overcome is a subject worth further investigation but is beyond the scope of this project. That said, the narrative of the capacity to overcome addiction—one that ignores the genetic, physical, and otherwise unalterable conditions—is a cultural construct similar to that of traditional disability narratives.



and Gatiss's initial installment builds on its titular association with Holmes's origin by including a retroactive alteration to the core of the character. As before, we are introduced first to Watson, whose search for an apartment leads him to Holmes. Brought together by a mutual acquaintance (Stamford in both texts), the two proceed to investigate a series of apparent suicides, during the course of which Holmes is variously described as a psychopath and a sociopath. At the initial crime scene, after having repeatedly faced disdain or outright antagonism from the police, Detective Sergeant Donovan warns Watson to stay away from Holmes:

You know why he's here? He's not paid or anything. He likes it. He gets off on it. The weirder the crime, the more he gets off. And you know what? One day just showing up won't be enough. One day we'll be standing round a body and Sherlock Holmes'll be the one that put it there. (*Sherlock*)

In response to Watson's question of why, Donovan explains "Because he's a psychopath. And psychopaths get bored." Before Holmes has a chance to explain his situation to Watson and the audience, the authorities have already labeled him as a potential danger and are carefully watching him, suspecting that he will someday snap and begin committing the crimes he currently solves. The police reaction to this character evokes a pair of narrative tropes: the misunderstood but helpful outsider and the equivalence of sociopath and serial killer as established by a preponderance of late twentieth-century crime narratives. At this early point the narrative implies that there is something fundamentally wrong with *Sherlock's* Holmes, relying on audiences being primed by serial killer narratives, but the very fact of his being called Holmes in a series titled *Sherlock* suggests that the misunderstood outsider is a worthwhile consideration.

An imagined link between the detective's mental state and that of the killer leads the detectives to search Holmes's apartment, as they suspect his fantastic assertions are

based more on first-hand experience as the perpetrator of the crime than logical deduction. In discovering unreported evidence from the most recent murder, Anderson, one of the officers least trusting of Holmes, reads Holmes's possession of this material as proof of his involvement with the crime, stating "According to someone, the murderer has the case, and we found it in the hands of our favorite psychopath." Off-handedly, Holmes corrects the description: "I'm not a psychopath, Anderson. I'm a high-functioning sociopath. Do your research." The distinction made by Holmes here, one that Konnikova does not recognize, is not just a question of semantics. Originally proposed in the late nineteen seventies by Dr. Robert Hare to the committee producing the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* as "psychopathy," based upon his own definition of the condition, a modified version, called "Antisocial Personality Disorder," appears in the text later produced in 1980. Reflecting on a later edition, Hare notes that in

the recently published DSM-IV (1994), "antisocial personality disorder" refers primarily to a cluster of criminal and antisocial behaviors. The majority of criminals easily meet the criteria for such a diagnosis. "Psychopathy," on the other hand, is defined by a cluster of both personality traits and socially deviant behaviors. Most criminals are not psychopaths, and many of the individuals who manage to operate on the shady side of the law and remain out of prison are psychopaths. (Hare 25)

Further confusing the issue, in neither Hare's description of psychopathy nor the *DSM-IV* does the term "sociopath" occur, and Holmes's self-description places him into a tangle of complicated definitions and expectations from which it is difficult to arrive at any clear understanding.

Hare recognizes the vagueness of the term "sociopath" in his book *Without Conscience* (1999), in which he reads the distinction between the terms as, at root, a question of the disorder's origins: "some clinicians and researchers—as well as most

sociologists and criminologists—who believe that the syndrome is forged entirely by social forces and early experiences prefer the term *sociopath*, while those...who feel that psychological, biological and genetic factors also contribute...generally use the term *psychopath*” (23, emphasis in the original). This organization of terms places Moffat and Gatiss’s presentation of Holmes within a model that locates responsibility for the detective’s condition in society instead of genetics, thereby implying that Holmes was in some sense damaged during his upbringing. In this model, we might be expected to have some sympathy for the character, who, while certainly amoral and cruel despite his various deductive talents, was not born this way. A *sociopath* Holmes implies a kind of responsibility not just for Holmes’s family but for our society that may have allowed conditions that could produce such individuals to come into existence; his condition would then be a critique insofar as viewers might not wish anyone to be *made* to exist as he does. At the same time such a useful crime-solving individual also would also operate as a paradoxical validation of the conditions that led to his current state, which after all is quite helpful when faced with problem cases that standard police work has difficulty solving.

Compelling as this is, there is no evidence that Moffat and Gatiss sought to engage the debate over definitions at this level, though the comparative deployment of the two terms in the same text recognizes a difference in evaluative capacity at the very least. Putting “psychopath” into the mouths of critical agents of social order and directing it against our titular protagonist suggests a pejorative connotation for the word; the police call Holmes a psychopath because they believe, as Donovan remarks to Watson above, that he is a monster who will inevitably kill people. In defending himself with a different

diagnosis of “high-functioning sociopath,” Holmes denies culpability in the murder but acknowledges that he is not neurotypical. A “high-functioning” sociopath would, according to the logic here, possess some of the psychological characteristics of a psychopath, making it possible for the police to confuse him with such a person, but they would not engage in murder, as Holmes uses the term used to deflect those charges. Usefully, the adjective “high functioning” is often applied to other mental conditions—notably autism—and generally refers to an individual’s capacity to live “normally.” As described in the definition provided by James Ladell Sanders in his discussion of the historical situation of autism spectrum diagnoses, High Functioning Autism “is considered to be autism absent of cognitive delay, or in other words, an IQ above 70” (1562). This absence “of cognitive delay” suggests that such individuals could participate in “normal” society relatively effectively—they function at a high level. Though there is no functional definition for a “high functioning sociopath” in relevant literature, comparison with High Functioning Autism suggests a person whose condition does not remove them from “normal” society—in short, they are capable of participation beyond expectations of “normal” sociopaths; they are not likely murderers.

Within their narrative, the creators assert a spectrum of psychopathy/sociopathy, in which murderers and other “monsters” exist on one extreme and “high-functioning,” non-monstrous individuals appear on the other. There are shared characteristics, including anti-social behaviors of various sorts that Holmes exhibits, but there are distinctions that must be acknowledged as well. Such a range echoes the autism spectrum as well as a cultural shift in awareness and expectation of the psychopath/sociopath, both clinically as well as representationally. According to Hare, “in recent years there has been

a dramatic upsurge in the public's exposure to the machinations and depredations of psychopaths" (xi), creating a greater awareness of the condition—if often filled with misconceptions—and, through the variety of texts presenting psychopaths and sociopaths, a sense of the possible range of psychopathic behavior. Perhaps once largely confined to villain roles in horror and thriller texts, psychopaths have moved on rather dramatically. From Norman Bates, the prototypical film psychopath, to the “the embodiment of pure evil” in Michael Myers, who has “the highest score for serious psychological problems” according to Fischhoff et al.’s “The Psychological Appeal of Movie Monsters” (2005), to the variously diagnosed villain and protagonist Hannibal Lecter, variously thought to be a sociopath, psychopath, or inscrutable to normal diagnoses depending on the text in which he appears, to the sociopath antihero Dexter Morgan, of Jeff Lindsay’s novels and the Showtime television series *Dexter* (2006-2013), cultural presentations of psychopathy or sociopathy have grown far more permissive.

This shift in what audiences expect and allow with regard to diagnosed psychopaths exists in tandem with Hare’s awareness of the “dramatic upsurge in the public’s exposure” to the condition and its effects, creating a feedback loop of expectation and performance. Pop psychology texts exploring sociopathy and psychopathy prepare their readers to understand and perhaps even embrace this group of differently operating minds in various fascinating ways. Robert Hare’s own *Snakes in Suits: When Psychopaths Go to Work* (2006) acknowledges the advantages of amoral decision-making in the business world, something that Kevin Dutton’s *The Wisdom of Psychopaths: What Saints, Spies, and Serial Killers Can Teach Us about Success* (2012) not only recognizes but embraces. Dutton also includes a chapter on the experience of—

and applications for—a medical procedure allowing him to experience “thinking” like a psychopath for a few hours. He asserts along with Hare that we as a culture are becoming more psychopathic (Dutton 130), but that this is not necessarily bad, just something we need to acknowledge and prepare for. Crucially, he approaches psychopathy as a spectrum similar to that of autism (39), with certain traits appearing and disappearing depending on the individual—clearly something Moffat and Gatiss would appreciate. And Jon Ronson, author of *The Psychopath Test* (2012) explores the inherent problems of diagnosis, both on a professional and amateur level, given easy availability of Hare’s criteria and the difficulties of interpretation that they create. These three authors demonstrate not only the changing nature of our cultural approach to the condition but also our continuing fascination with it—something *Sherlock* participates in with relish.

Giving the show’s main character a diagnosis of sociopathy, even if a complex and somewhat fraught one, is a canny strategy for attracting interest in the series, playing on both cultural interest in neurological difference and the desire to use canonical details in creative ways. As Klinger and other interested fans use various canonical details to support their pet diagnoses, they participate in the game of expanding the character while remaining within the acceptable boundaries of Conan Doyle’s original. Pushing beyond this game, Moffat and Gatiss’s series not only makes an assertion regarding Holmes’s psychological condition but returns to it regularly throughout their show, putting neurodiversity at the heart of “A Study in Pink.” While Holmes’s surprising rebuttal to police suspicion sparks excitement, the show opens not with the detective or the case under investigation but with Watson, suffering from nightmares after returning from military service in Afghanistan, a deployment similar to Conan Doyle’s version of the

character. Readjusting to civilian life, Watson meets regularly with a therapist who has suggested that he write a daily blog (which eventually becomes the space in which Watson publishes his and Holmes's adventures). This therapy session and Watson's clear mental distress are presented to the audience before the opening credits even begin to roll, literally foregrounding the show's interest in mental difference and, though this opens a question explored in the following section, mental damage.

When the credits begin, they subtly continue to demonstrate an interest in different kinds of minds, opening with a shot of a London intersection, taken from above the street and looking down into it, in which vehicles and people move in fast-forward, all presented with a focusing technique called "tilt-shift photography." In this format, images of the real world appear as miniatures or models, an effect created here through manipulation of the video to create a shallow depth of field.<sup>3</sup> This effect tricks the mind into believing that the image presented must be of something very close, and thus very small, due to the out-of-focus background and foreground, as only focusing on very near things blurs both nearer and further objects so dramatically. Aside from producing an interesting and somewhat novel take on an average intersection, creating a tilt-shift effect makes the world seem like a toy, a set of objects to be played with. It is true that while Holmes sometimes refers to his cases as "games,"<sup>4</sup> Conan Doyle's detective would perhaps balk at considering the entire world to be composed of pieces movable at his leisure—though such a reading could fit a sociopath "completely lacking in conscience

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<sup>3</sup> The traditional method of producing this effect relies on camera movement and a "tilt-shift lens," which is how it can be produced using a traditional non-video camera and the source of the effect's name. For most film and video applications, digital alteration is required to create the "miniaturization" effect.

<sup>4</sup> Though not the originator of the phrase "the game's afoot," Doyle does have Holmes say the line to Watson in "The Adventure of the Abbey Grange," a story first published in *The Strand* in 1904 and later collected in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* (1905).

and feeling for others, selfishly tak[ing] what they want and do[ing] as they please” (Hare xi). Briefly overlaid with an image of Holmes staring through a magnifying glass, the sequence invites the audience to connect this presentation of the world with the detective’s perception of it—a claim for the mechanical, rote operation of most people’s lives as seen by someone outside the system, perhaps a belief that the world is as easily manipulated as a toy train set, or both.

The detective’s actions and attitude confirm the hints offered by the credits, with brusque though charismatic interactions with other characters, disdain for emotional reaction or connection, and a willingness to ignore social and legal constraints for the pursuit of his own interests. Though Moffat and Gatiss deserve significant credit for conceiving this psychologically distinct vision of Holmes, Benedict Cumberbatch’s performance echoes their efforts quite effectively. From his initial appearance in the series, in which he is thrust into the frame from above, upside-down, viewers are clearly meant to think that this version of Holmes is somewhat odd—perhaps even more fundamentally so than the quirkiness that seems to pervade Holmes performances on screen.<sup>5</sup> Initially facing a recently deceased corpse, a dispassionate Holmes turns toward lab assistant Molly Hooper and the camera to ask for a riding crop, a large smile breaking out on his face that does not quite reach his eyes. We then watch him violently assault the corpse with the crop, uninterested in or oblivious to the romantic overtures made by Molly—though he demonstrates his attention to detail by noticing her “refreshed” lipstick. This Holmes is a master of deduction and involved in criminal investigations as in the canon, but the apparent enjoyment he receives from assaulting a dead body and his

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<sup>5</sup> One might consider the excitability of Jeremy Brett’s Holmes or the nervous, twitchy performance of Robert Downey Jr. among the variety of bizarre presentations of the character over the years; once again, Alan Barnes’s book is invaluable for its breadth of performances.



disinterest in Molly as an individual (much less a potential romantic partner) suggest that audiences should temper any expectations of canonical fidelity.

Throughout the show and the remainder of the series, Cumberbatch's Holmes is remarkably energetic yet also flat emotionally. He grows excited when faced with puzzles and difficult to solve dilemmas and shows signs of stress when solutions do not come easily. At the same time he is terse and abrupt with almost everyone he encounters, exhibiting quick annoyance and even frustration when those around him do not sufficiently keep up with his deductions. While these seem to be canonically supportable decisions of presentation, Cumberbatch's performance emphasizes these traits while minimizing the emotional connections in the series. Konnikova is not wrong to assert that the canonical Holmes cares for both Watson and Mrs. Hudson, and numerous examples of his kindness toward others appear throughout Conan Doyle's texts. Moffat and Gatiss clearly are not interested in that aspect of Holmes, and Cumberbatch plays along by keeping the vast majority of positive emotional expressions off of his face and almost never allowing them near his eyes. His excitement is reserved almost exclusively for things that the average person would find difficult to celebrate at the very least; after hearing about another in a series of suicides he jumps around his apartment in great joy saying "Brilliant! Yes! Four serial suicides and now a note." Cumberbatch offers viewers a Holmes who sees the world as a set of complex toys that bump into each other in interesting ways but whose actions are always deducible, much as the tilt-shift photography of the introduction implies.

Along with the cleverly produced introduction and the performance by Cumberbatch, the series relies upon a data presentation format quite different from prior

Holmes movies or shows: the representation of internal thinking processes visually. This strategy gives viewers of the series an inside look at Holmes's mind—something only Watson allowed in the canon and in the majority of other adaptations.<sup>6</sup> Though some of the time the data visualization does not seem to offer true insight, as when Holmes's texts reach an entire press room at once, when he looks at a crime scene the true value of these data becomes clear. At the first major crime scene of "A Study in Pink," Holmes observes the scene of the murder and the body there, determining as he looks at it that the woman must have been left-handed—and as he does so, the phrase "left-handed" appears above the broken fingernails Holmes used to make the deduction. Scratched into the floor are the letters "RACHE", a clear nod to "A Study in Scarlet" where the same letters were scrawled over a murder. In that text, the letters indicated the German word for "revenge"; that fact appears in this scene as well ("RACHE, *German* (n) revenge"), presented first just above the scratched letters as though viewed from Holmes's perspective and then, as the camera angle switches to show the audience Holmes's face, the phrase persists but is mirrored, indicating that the words are appearing quite literally in Holmes's line of sight. They indicate to the reader what is going on inside Holmes's head, clarifying that we should perceive these data not solely as clues handed to us but as a literal reflection of Holmes's thoughts. The next visualization confirms this, as Holmes literally brushes the floating words out of the air and begins again, and our perspective shifts back to mirror Holmes's examination of the letters RACHE while a spinning alphabet wheel completes the word with an "L." Instantly the audience understands that Holmes has decided that

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<sup>6</sup> Ritchie's Holmes as played by Robert Downey Jr. offers readers some insight into the detective's deductive skill by presenting his narration of upcoming events, though this operates quite differently from *Sherlock*'s visualized data, being first almost exclusively physical (the cause and effect of a boxing match, for instance) and second not a hypothesis or working through of evidence (perhaps challenged by the end of *A Game of Shadows* (2012)).

RACHE is an unfinished word and attempts to complete it by spinning through possible letters that might do so. This kind of visual display helps *Sherlock* demonstrate Holmes's talents for deduction to the reader and gives the audience the sense that we should be paying close attention to the mind behind them. Our inside look at Holmes's mind is more than a trick—more than a unique selling point for the show; by presenting the data in this way, Moffat and Gatiss indicate that they are interested in trying to get inside Sherlock Holmes's head and see what makes him different.<sup>7</sup>

This would perhaps be enough, but Moffat and Gatiss provide a greater confirmation of their concern with mental difference in the murderer whose crimes produce the case that Holmes and Watson investigate throughout “A Study in Pink.” The murderer, a cab driver that Holmes had overlooked previously, compares himself to the detective in one of their first real exchanges:

CABBIE: Sherlock Holmes, look at you! Here in the flesh. That website of yours, your fan told me about it.

HOLMES: My fan?

CABBIE: You are brilliant. You are. A proper genius. “The Science of Deduction.” Now that is proper thinking. Between you and me sitting here, why can't people think? Don't it make you mad? Why can't people just think?

HOLMES: Oh, I see. So you're a proper genius too.

CABBIE: Don't look it, do I? Funny little man driving a cab. But you'll know better in a minute. Chances are it'll be the last thing you ever know.

The “proper genius” connection between Holmes and the cabbie explains the difficulty the police have had in catching him and establishes a bond between himself and the detective, as it takes a man who thinks as he does to keep up with him. The phrase has complicated resonances, however, as it could imply—and perhaps does, for the cabbie—

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<sup>7</sup> The variety of ways in which the show presents these visualizations makes a full analysis difficult and time-consuming, but it is clear that Moffat and Gatiss want to see this strange mind in action. For a more unified presentation of this, see the HBO movie *Temple Grandin* (2010) starring Claire Danes; this film attempts to present Grandin's thought processes specifically based on her own descriptions of them, making an interesting companion piece to *Sherlock*.

that being a “proper genius” capable of “proper thinking” involves the absence of emotion and empathy. To be such a person, one must be a “proper” sociopath, capable of killing as easily as solving mysteries; the implications suggest that there might be a space for someone who thinks like *Sherlock*’s Holmes, that their mental difference makes them useful and perhaps even necessary. And in making this claim, the show places itself squarely within discussions of neurodiversity.

Shortly following this exchange, the cabbie emphasizes the concern that Holmes might slip, voiced previously by Detective Sergeant Donovan, recognizing that “You’re not the only one to enjoy a good murder. There’s others out there just like you.” The line between interest in and willingness to commit murder is very thin for the antagonist, and in goading Holmes in this fashion, he implies a belief that Holmes might change sides—much as he himself did, having not murdered anyone until it became useful to him to do so. The cabbie makes one final jab at Holmes, recognizing a parallel between the detective and himself:

CABBIE: I bet you get bored, don’t you? I know you do. A man like you, so clever. But what’s the point of being clever if you can’t prove it? Still the addict. But this is what you’re really addicted to, innit? You’d do anything, anything at all, to stop being bored.

Playing again on the canonical addiction and boredom, *Sherlock* places its protagonist against a mirror of himself, an intelligent serial killer capable of murdering others for his own gain. With a world as easy to manipulate as Holmes’s, the temptation to make things more interesting is a substantial risk, and the cabbie recognizes this and pushes the detective with it. The episode creates the link between Holmes and the cab driver to offer the character a choice of social versus anti-social action, allowing the audience to see this decision play out before them. Holmes must decide whether to play the cabbie’s game,

admitting that he is in fact much like the villain, or to turn the cabbie in and risk not being able to prove his own intelligence.

The decision has significant consequences for the text's position on Holmes's value, but instead of letting him make the "right," society-affirming decision, his final choice is interrupted by the arrival of Watson, who shoots the cabbie and prevents Holmes from making his choice. This clearly indicates the importance of a social network in assisting (or perhaps compelling) positive decision-making, but it leaves the audience in doubt as to Holmes's capacity to remain a hero when faced with the opportunity for creative, stimulating villainy. As such, the episode engages in a debate over the role of non-neurotypical individuals without providing a solid answer about the value of those who are not "normal." It not only presents a new version of Conan Doyle's detective, it places that detective into a fascinating—and highly topical—conundrum best approached through the lens of disability studies.

Though psychopathy or anti-social personality disorder is not generally considered a disability in the traditional sense, disability as a concept is itself relatively new and, according to Mark Osteen in his introduction to *Autism and Representation* (2008), "disability scholarship has ignored cognitive, intellectual or neurological disabilities, thereby excluding the intellectually disabled just as mainstream society has done" (3). Whether either condition "counts" as a disability,<sup>8</sup> the narrative that Moffat

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<sup>8</sup> Lennard Davis's description of what a disability is, based upon the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, asserts that "disability includes...those who are regarded as having a limitation or interference with daily life activities such as hearing, speaking, seeing, walking, moving, thinking, breathing, and learning. Under this definition, one now has to include people with invisible impairments such as arthritis, diabetes, epilepsy, muscular dystrophy, cystic fibrosis, multiple sclerosis, heart and respiratory problems, cancer, developmental disabilities, dyslexia, AIDS, and so on. When we start conceiving of disability as a descriptive term and not as an absolute category, then we can begin to think in theoretical and political ways about this category" (8); based upon this, psychopathy or anti-social personality disorder could certainly qualify, depending upon how "thinking" is considered here.

and Gatiss have created for their twenty-first century Holmes and Watson is one that relies upon the language and expectations of disability—all while participating in a classic tradition of disabled detectives. The detective's role as an upholder of social order is more complicated when a mental condition makes that goal difficult, forcing the audience to consider the position of those who do not fit traditional expectations, exposing the bias toward the “normal” in the detective genre.

### **A Disabled Detective**

Detectives across the history of the genre have been written with a variety of disabilities, and the number and diversity of conditions inspired Gary Hoppenstand and Ray B. Browne to collect some of the most interesting early examples in their books *The Defective Detective in the Pulps* (1983) and its follow-up *More Tales of the Defective Detective in the Pulp* (1985). Before their reprints of the texts, Hoppenstand and Brown provide a brief introduction in which they relate these classic materials to newer detectives, noting in the introduction to their first text that no matter when such “defective” detectives appear, their “eccentricities paraphrase [their] style, and [their] style communicates [their] individuality” (*Defective Detective* 1). Elaborating on this idea, they argue that these “detectives were heroes who rose above their particular handicaps, succeeding because of—or in spite of—their disabilities” (6). Here a “defect” or disability functions to both separate detectives from each other and provide the basis for a narrative of “overcoming” a problem, and though Hoppenstand and Brown do not read this critically, their awareness of this repetition matches that of David Mitchell, who

reads the pattern as the fundamental cultural narrative of disability, using his concept “narrative prosthesis.”

In his definition of the term, Mitchell relies on a description with striking similarities to Hoppenstand and Brown’s description of their detectives: “the perpetual discursive dependency on disability [is called] *narrative prosthesis*...Disability lends a distinctive idiosyncrasy to any characters that differentiate themselves from the anonymous background of the norm” (Mitchell 15-16, emphasis in original). This desire to “differentiate” one character from another, noted in *Defective Detectives*’ introduction, is a fundamental necessity for all writers of fiction, though Conan Doyle was able to set Holmes apart without resorting to the use of clear disabilities that later writers relied upon. However, as the later, post-Holmes proliferation of detectives needed means with which to distinguish themselves disability became and remains useful shorthand for creating individuality and providing an easily understood impediment to overcome in the course of their story. In the traditional form of these stories as outlined by Mitchell, “Disability cannot be accommodated in the ranks of the norm(als), and thus there are two options for dealing with the difference that drives the story’s plot: a disability is either left behind or punished for its lack of conformity” (Mitchell 23); as Hoppenstand and Brown note, in the case of their collected examples the detectives “rose above their particular handicaps” in a way that Mitchell would treat as leaving them behind—they cease to matter, as the work that they might have prevented occurs, erasing the effect of the disability.

Building upon this concept, Mitchell constructs a more complete sense of what this “use” of disability means:

Narrative prosthesis...is the notion that all narratives operate out of a desire to compensate for a limitation or to reign in excessiveness. This narrative approach to difference identifies the literary object par excellence as that which has somehow become out of the ordinary—a deviation from a widely accepted cultural norm. Literary narratives seek to begin a process of explanatory compensation wherein perceived aberrances can be rescued from ignorance, neglect, or misunderstanding for their readerships. (20)

In rescuing these “perceived aberrances” the established status quo is reaffirmed and cultural norms are left fully operational; Mitchell argues that this is work done by literature across the spectrum of genres and possibilities, and it is particularly visible whenever disability appears. The use of disability to “compensate” and “reign in” difference “provides a means through which literature performs its social critique while simultaneously sedimenting stigmatizing beliefs about people with disabilities” (24)—namely that disability is something that can be overcome with time and effort, that those who are disabled must work to conform to expected norms, and often that doing so requires the help of an able individual who puts them back on the road toward successful social contribution.

Mitchell’s “narrative prosthesis” is a fundamental concept for contemporary disability studies, building upon what earlier writers such as Lennard Davis recognized in his *Enforcing Normalcy* (1995) as the need to “focus not so much on the construction of disability as on the construction of normalcy...because the ‘problem’ is not the person with disabilities; the problem is the way that normalcy is constructed to create the ‘problem’ of the disabled person” (23-24). Davis’s equally essential contribution traces the creation of the “normal” throughout the nineteenth century in a very Foucauldian manner, revisiting the history of the term and finding it to be a construction and not a



simple given.<sup>9</sup> This work provides the basis for Mitchell's clear recognition of the persistent strategy underpinning the appearance of disability in literature. The contributions of Davis and Mitchell, alongside those of many other theorists and analysts such as Sharon Snyder and Paul Longmore, form the basis of disability studies, which Tom Shakespeare and Nicholas Watson consider "the quintessential post-modern concept, because it is so complex, so variable, so contingent, so situated. It sits at the intersection of biology and society and of agency and structure" (Shakespeare 19). For these authors, the attempt to create a "modernist theory of disability—seeking to provide an overarching meta-analysis covering all dimensions of every disabled person's experience—is not a useful or attainable goal" (Shakespeare 19) because of the situated individuality of disability, making Holmes's mental difference part of a significant postmodern concern.

Though Mitchell's argument extends far beyond the cases of detective fiction, his presentation of material is both compelling and useful for understanding *Sherlock's* vision of Holmes, offering a basis for comparing Moffat and Gatiss's text against an existing template. However, both Mitchell and Davis worked within the realm of physical disability, and it is only recently that mental disabilities have been considered part of the field—though the inclusion of such concerns complicates the discussion in a fascinating

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<sup>9</sup> Owing a great deal to Foucault, Davis's work is extraordinarily useful for understanding the historical construction of "normal": "...the very term that permeates our contemporary life—the normal—is a configuration that arises in a particular historical moment. It is part of a notion of progress, of industrialization, and of ideological consolidation of the power of the bourgeoisie. The implications of the hegemony of normalcy are profound and extend into the very heart of cultural production...Characters with disabilities are always marked with ideological meaning, as are moments of disease or accident that transform such characters. One of the tasks for developing a consciousness of disability issues is the attempt, then to reverse the hegemony of the normal and to institute alternative ways of thinking about the abnormal" (49). Holmes's situation is meaningful as pastiche *and* as part of discussions about the role of "the abnormal." However, Mitchell's reading extends this discussion further, asserting a specific vision of disability throughout literature regardless of the date of its creation.

and useful way. Toward the end of Mitchell's essay, he posits that the story of Oedipus, despite its age, makes for a fascinating example of disability literature, as the character's name comes from the likely crippling injury he suffered as a child ("oedipus" meaning "swollen foot," coming from the pinning of his feet together as an infant so that he would die of exposure when abandoned by his parent) and his ability to parse the sphinx's riddle logically may come from the greater insight his injury provides into the various kinds of walking instruments used by humans over the course of their lives. However, Mitchell asserts that the injury is entirely absent from the story save in the name and the way it helps to identify the character—disability has no impact on the character's subjectivity. Alongside providing useful evidence for his "narrative prosthesis," the example clarifies that physical disability is not expected to have an impact on mental processes and therefore no alteration to subjectivity. Certainly Mitchell does not himself believe this, but the addition of mental difference to the discussion of disability prevents even the illusion that difference has no impact on subjectivity and identity.

This consideration makes Mark Osteen's recognition of mental disability's general absence from disability studies somewhat surprising, for if recognizing the effects disability has on subjectivity is one of Mitchell's central concerns, then conditions affecting the mind are the example *par excellence*. Osteen asserts that although "physically disabled people are increasingly involved in all aspects of labor and social life, the intellectually disabled are shoved to the side. Our society's ideology of bourgeois individualism and personal productivity does not know what to do with those who cannot 'compete' or 'produce'" (5), or perhaps those who produce differently or within a framework disconnected from that of "bourgeois individualism." The work done to

acknowledge the possible contributions of the physically disabled<sup>10</sup> has made a shift in considerations of people with disabilities possible, moving away from a belief that disability defines individuality and slowly changing Lennard Davis's claim that "disabled people are thought of primarily in terms of their disability" (10). This work toward a greater sense of physical disability's impact on subjectivity has made it possible to consider mental disabilities' parallel effect, but doing so is more difficult because of the larger difference in subjectivity that these conditions create—a significant component of Osteen's concerns when he acknowledges our problems with knowing "what to do with" people who see the world so differently.

Within this complex theorization of disability in fiction, Moffat and Gatiss's version of Sherlock Holmes appears inevitably as both a continuation and a critique of traditional disability narrative. Their creation not only exemplifies some of the questions and issues discussed by the various scholars but also evades some of the traditional expectations and thus provides a sense that growing awareness of disability issues can help create new disability narratives. To have a sense of what it is that "A Study in Pink" does so well, it is useful to begin with a framework for the classic steps, which Mitchell provides in his article:

A simple schematic of narrative structure might run: first, a deviance or marked difference is exposed to a reader; second, a narrative consolidates the need for its own existence by calling for an explanation of the deviation's origins and formative consequences; third, the deviance is brought from the periphery of concerns to the center stage of the story to come; and fourth, the remainder of the story seeks to rehabilitate or fix the deviance in some manner, shape, or form. (20)

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<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the most important of which are the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans With Disabilities Act (1990).

With this model we have a four-part structure to consider, and though each is uniquely important, Mitchell places emphasis on the resolution of the narrative in the fourth stage. He further explains that the expected “repair of deviance may involve an obliteration of the difference through a cure, the rescue of the despised object from social censure, the extermination of the deviant as a purification of the social body, or the revaluation of an alternative mode of experience” (20). Of these concluding possibilities, only the fourth carries with it a positive presentation of disability, but even that may be undercut by previous material, making the interplay between the phases the most important consideration.

Looking at *Sherlock*, we can begin to put the decisions made throughout the episode into the context of disability. Alongside the emphasis Mitchell places on resolution, the initial appearance of the condition within the narrative receives nearly as much attention. He notes that the exposure of deviance “begins with a stare, a gesture of disgust, a slander or derisive comment...a note of gossip about a rare or unsightly presence, a comment on the unsuitability of deformity for the appetites of polite society, or a sentiment about the unfortunate circumstances that bring disabilities into being” (Mitchell 22). Detective Sergeant Donovan’s explanation of Holmes’s condition to Watson matches this description almost perfectly; in her assertion that “He gets off on it...and the weirder the crime, the more he gets off,” we see deviant thinking presented in a highly critical fashion. Her reasoning for this, that “psychopaths get bored,” clarifies that the difference is in the diagnosis and that the mental condition is the fundamental concern for her fears.

Though Donovan's concerns represent an official perspective and thus carry significant weight, her superior, Inspector Lestrade, is willing to allow Holmes to investigate cases that they do not understand or are making no headway on. Unlike the early, less-regulated period of criminal investigation in which Conan Doyle's Holmes appeared, Lestrade's readiness to accept the help of an amateur "consulting detective" is indicative of significant and authorized trust within the police department. Further, the actual diagnosis is debatable, despite Donovan's allegation and Anderson's later repetition; Holmes actively defends himself against the claim with a separate opinion. Opening up debate regarding the nature of the difference, this defense presents an idea of stigmatized difference commensurate with Mitchell's schema while also destabilizing the ease with which it is possible to name the deviation. In so doing, the show acknowledges the expected path of the disability narrative but does not fully commit to that path. The method of critique, a disagreement of applicable terminology, also hints at the difficulty of fully understanding any given difference, though certainly the audience is expected to believe Holmes's more virtuous explanation than the police's more problematic version, given his history and the show's title.

The difficulty with definition—implying the complexity of determining and assigning causation—continues in *Sherlock*'s failure to provide any sense of the origins of Holmes's condition. Mitchell explains that the second part of the traditional disability narrative is the proof of need for the story in "an explanation of the deviation's origins and formative consequences," but Moffat and Gatiss do not provide this within their show. In part, this absence can be laid at the feet of psychology's inability to determine a cause for psychopathy or sociopathy; while certain structural differences in the brain exist

between those diagnosed with psychopathy and a “normal” brain,<sup>11</sup> there is no consensus about their causes. Lack of consensus is no barrier to fiction, and thus the decision to avoid providing an explanation has resonance beyond conformity with real-world psychology. The creators could have selected one of a number of possible theories explaining it—as Meyer does in his account of Holmes’s breakdown in *The Seven-percent Solution*—but in leaving the source of their detective’s difference indeterminate, they again violate the pattern of disability narrative. Leaving aside any explanation does not deny the consolidation of a disability narrative’s “need for its own existence,” it instead creates a new need. The show’s awareness of the variety of minds, from the neurotypical police to the significantly neurologically different Holmes and cabbie, establishes the need for neurodiversity awareness.

Even when an apparent source exists for a mental condition the show avoids easy assumptions of causation and definition. *Sherlock*’s Watson, despite his apparent post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) caused by his service in Afghanistan, is diagnosed more successfully by Holmes’s brother Mycroft than his psychiatrist. The doctor’s combat experience and nightmares are read by his analyst as part of his difficulty adjusting to “civilian life” and PTSD, something that Mycroft guesses based on his very short time with Watson. This observation accompanies a realization that the stress of combat was not the problem, and that whatever Watson’s difficulties with “civilian life” might be, they are not caused by negative reaction to stress. Holmes later makes a similar observation and analysis, helping Watson come to the same understanding of himself. Though there are problems with the critique of traditional psychoanalysis and

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<sup>11</sup> See both Dutton’s “Psychopathy’s Double Edge” and Gregory et al.’s “The Antisocial Brain: Psychopathy Matters” for a fuller description of these differences.

psychological theory (first and foremost being the idea that amateur psychologists can accomplish what trained professionals cannot, which is admittedly central to the Sherlock Holmes narrative), there is also here a recognition that some cases do not fit expected paradigms—that when exploring the nature and cause of difference, expectations regarding “origins and formative consequences” can quickly become irrational dogma not based on observation and reason.

In avoiding Mitchell’s model for origins and causation in disability narratives, “A Study in Pink” asserts that those causes cannot be fully known, and its expansion of the third phase, the centering of the story on the disability, makes plain the episode’s interest in the nature of disability and stories featuring disability. The revelation that the villain is not only a simple cabbie but also a “proper genius” like Holmes makes the question of Holmes’s diagnosis highly relevant to the conclusion of the story; unlike Holmes, the cabbie is not a “high-functioning sociopath” who chooses not to kill, he is a wolf in sheep’s clothing, a serial killer and likely high-scorer on Hare’s psychopath test. Standing on the far end of the spectrum, the cabbie tempts the detective with the promise of a more “interesting” life killing people, and in presenting this debate to the audience Moffat and Gatiss put the range of possibilities on display, making it a central question. Holmes’s decision to participate in the cabbie’s game would be an acknowledgement that they are on the same end and perhaps a dismissal of idea of a spectrum altogether, confirming the police’s worst fears; his denial of it would “prove” the range of possibilities. There can be little doubt that this places the difference at the center of the narrative. However, while Mitchell establishes that the focus on disability occurs later in traditional models, “A Study in Pink” opens with Watson’s difficulties and makes the suspicion of Holmes’s

participation in the murders a central facet. This marks a difference between a text using disability as a crutch to highlight difference and re-establish conformity—a true narrative prosthesis—and a text interested in the disability narrative itself. In its focus on disability throughout, *Sherlock* is most definitely the latter.

The fourth and final step of disability narratives is the rehabilitation of the disability, and in the case of “A Study in Pink,” this “fix” occurs either throughout the episode as a valuation of a different mode of perception or it does not occur at all. Certainly there is no final critique through cure, censure, or extermination, as Holmes survives the narrative and his talents allow him to solve the crime without reliance on any change to his sociopathy/psychopathy. The conclusion flirts with the possibility that the detective might embrace murder to relieve boredom, and without Watson’s intervention in the final moments Holmes might have done so, ending clearly in the realm of social censure and a claim that the deviance from the norm is at root fundamentally anti-social. However, the episode does not make this choice, and Holmes ends as the hero, establishing that not all those who might be considered dangerous are so; *Sherlock* embraces a spectrum of anti-social disorders and thus firmly embraces the positive side of neurodiversity. In avoiding the censure or erasure of disability, Moffat and Gatiss’s show engages the questions and some of the expectations of the traditional disability narrative, presenting their audience with a vision of the detective that is both familiar and novel and using this presentation to make a strong claim for the value of different kinds of minds.

At a fundamental level, this claim provides an alternative to the pre-disability studies vision of disability, which Osteen recognizes as employing “a ‘deficit’ or



‘medical’ model that represents disability as an individual problem or impairment to be cured or at least mitigated” (1) and Mitchell describes as viewing “disability as a problem in need of a solution” (15). Critical of this resolution-based vision of disability, the work done through disability studies has sought to recognize the ways in which cultural representation codifies this negative perspective. Moffat and Gatiss’s series participates in this evolving view of disabled individuals and their possible roles and contributions, and with “A Study in Pink” they not only provide reason to consider alternative models for disability but place that within a context of continued cultural skepticism; their series is a fictional presentation of disability studies itself.

With a clearer picture of disability studies in place, the series’ use of Conan Doyle’s creation to resituate canonical Holmes into the disability studies conversation is plain. Moffat and Gatiss cleverly rely on reader expectations of Holmes’s heroism alongside his canonical anti-social behaviors, heightening the latter into a disabling condition while retaining the heroism and the talent from the original series, echoing the strategy pursued by both King and Norbu. The combined intensification and conservation allow the series to take shape within traditional disability narratives while critiquing their implicit expectations. At the same time, the serendipitous canonical details that made this depiction plausible for (some) fans make possible a wide-reaching discussion of expectations for people with mental disabilities. Despite these fascinating uses of the character, there are some interesting contradictions inherent in the claims being made, as the “medical model” noted by Osteen comes directly out of the nineteenth-century normative sciences and empiricism—something with which Holmes is inextricably bound. In this way, we are meant to believe that one of the purest empiricists available,

one who observes and catalogues and creates testable hypotheses instead of guesses, is involved with the undoing of traditional observations and conditions across the field of psychology. Though this may seem like a deviation from expectation, Holmes's amateur status has always included a rigorous examination of official explanations and assertions alongside a logical, empiricist mindset; the detective is a critic and a careful thinker, and his willingness to question and test suggests continual revision instead of final determination. Similar to King's critique of Holmes's experience with women in chapter three, one of the fascinating things that can occur with a character like Holmes is his ability to reason his way to contemporary positions despite never holding them himself. If we have reasoned our way past limited expectations for people with disabilities, so too can Sherlock Holmes.

This very reasoning power opens a separate problem for Moffat and Gatiss's version of the character, as by retaining his incredible reasoning and deductive skill but placing the character on the sociopath spectrum, an association is created between the two. This association is supported culturally by the variety of pop psychology books noted above, many of which recognize significant advantages to "thinking like a psychopath," and by representations of extraordinarily clever killers such as Dexter Morgan and Hannibal Lecter. These characters are unburdened by the confusion of empathy and other more "human" emotions and are thus able to reach heights of logic and analysis that are difficult for their neurotypical audiences. Though there is some truth to absence of emotional influence in the decision-making of psychopaths (see Hare's *Snakes in Suits* and Dutton's *The Wisdom of Psychopaths* for two among many demonstrations), it is equally true that psychopaths are no smarter than most neurotypical

individuals; they are simply more ruthless and can often appear more intelligent due to charismatic behavior. The representations of these people as not only different from but more than average humans fits what Longmore refers to as “compensation”: “God or nature or life compensates handicapped people for their loss, and the compensation is spiritual, moral, mental, and emotional...[including] detectives with superior skills” (138). This compensation when taken to extremes results in the blind crime-fighting super-hero Daredevil and similar characters, but it is no less dangerous here.

Referred to sometimes by the slang term “supercrip,” this presentation suggests not that individuals with disability are valuable in and of themselves but that what their difference allows them to do better than a neurotypical individual is what makes them useful members of society. Moffat and Gatiss’s Holmes dances around the edges of this, as there is no single point where his condition is noted as the source of his deductive powers, but it is also clear that his focus is not distracted by emotions (see his dismissal of interest from lab-tech Molly). Parallel to the “magical negro” stereotype, this perception of disability creates unreasonable expectations for disabled individuals and further validates the “ideology of bourgeois individualism” that expects social contributions to take an easily understood form. Though Holmes works well as a gateway to discussion of disability in many respects, this concern makes his contribution somewhat problematic. Even if Holmes does not fully support the compensation “supercrip” narrative (a charitable interpretation, to be sure), there is no sense that the character is challenging this stereotype either.

This remains a challenge for representations of mental difference broadly, and in Osteen’s attempt to recognize the importance of positive representations of autism he

notes that “in many of these efforts to celebrate rather than pathologize autistic traits is the sense that the unique qualities of perception, concentration, and selfhood among autistic people may also give rise to extraordinary creative abilities” (12), recognizing the difficulty of avoiding turning difference into superiority. Thomas Armstrong, in his book *Neurodiversity: Discovering the Extraordinary Gifts of Autism, ADHD, Dyslexia, and Other Brain Differences* (2010), makes it clear that he is “not seeking to romanticize mental illness,” recognizing the danger in making links between “depression, creativity, sensitivity, and perceptiveness” (23). The care with which this aspect of disability representation must be approached is considerable, given the ease of shifting into a compensatory rhetoric; Moffat and Gatiss’s use of Holmes in *Sherlock* is thus perhaps too blunt to fully engage with the difficulty such rhetoric presents, but the work they do provides an excellent critique of the disability narrative as a whole. However, in other texts the detective remains useful for discussions of mental difference—even when not the subject of a text—as Mark Haddon’s *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* (2003) demonstrates. This novel invokes Conan Doyle’s creation in its title, and its narrator uses the character to discuss his own perception of the world, allowing Holmes to be a touchstone for understanding between minds instead of a separate mind entirely. Haddon’s book avoids the compensation narrative but still relies on Holmes to help readers understand different minds and the value of neurodiversity.

### **Tracks Leading to Autism**

One of a number of texts exploring mental disability in adolescents in the first part of the twenty-first century,<sup>12</sup> Mark Haddon's *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* is a detective story told from the perspective of Christopher Boone, a teenaged boy seeking to catch the killer of a neighbor's dog. Christopher is not a neurotypical teen, but the nature of his disability is never clarified in the novel; though Christopher displays a number of characteristics associated with the autism spectrum, the words "autism" or "Asperger's" never appear in the text. This decision creates tension around the origins of Christopher's behavior and the treatment he receives, while also complicating the ease with which "disabled people are thought of primarily in terms of their disability" (Davis 10) and thus avoiding the origins and definition of the disability in Mitchell's schema for the traditional disability narrative. As Christopher investigates, the reader learns of his various limitations, including significant mind-blindness, literal-mindedness, and a variety of other minor concerns and requirements. Concurrently, the young investigator demonstrates his various strengths, including photographic memory, careful attention to detail, and a highly logical mind capable of impressive feats of reasoning and mathematics. Over the course of the narrative, his strengths and weaknesses help him to discover not only the identity of the dog's killer but also a secret about his family, leading him on a harrowing adventure to find the mother he believed to be dead. Though much of the mystery is resolved halfway through the narrative, the story's focus had long since shifted away from Christopher's investigation toward his identity and experiences.

Tied to both of these, however, are the format for the story Christopher tells and his inspiration for it. After opening with his discovery of the dead canine and an

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<sup>12</sup> See also *Seriously Weird* (2003) by Gene Kemp, *Speed of Dark* (2002) by Elizabeth Moon, or Kathy Hoopman's "Asperger Adventures" including *Lisa and the Lace-maker* (200), *The Blue Bottle Mystery* (2000), and *Of Mice and Aliens* (2001).

uncomfortable experience with the police (Christopher does not like being touched, and the police officer tries to move him from the scene), he explains his choice of narrative structure:

I do like murder mystery novels. So I am writing a murder mystery novel. In a murder mystery novel someone has to work out who the murderer is and then catch them. It is a puzzle. If it is a good puzzle, you can sometimes work out the answer before the end of the book. (Haddon 5)

Christopher's decision to write a "murder mystery novel" stems from its puzzle-like structure, which provides a logical narrative based upon observation and inference from relevant clues—it is a logic problem, and Christopher is particularly strong with logic. The narrator's favorite text provides additional inspiration for his choice; "*The Hound of the Baskervilles* is [his] favorite book" (69) because it is a detective story with clues and red herrings (70-71) but also because, as he says,

I like Sherlock Holmes and I think that if I were a proper detective he is the kind of detective I would be. He is very intelligent and he solves the mystery and he says

*The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes.*

But he notices them, like I do. Also it says in the book

*Sherlock Holmes had, in a very remarkable degree, the power of detaching his mind at will.*

And this is like me, too, because if I get really interested in something...I don't notice anything else. (73, emphasis and lineation in original)

Christopher not only finds the format of the murder mystery appealing because of its logic, he finds parallels between himself and one of its greatest characters, acknowledging his admiration of the detective and modeling his own actions after the narrative structure of a Holmes case, constructing his identity in part through comparison with Holmes. As noted previously, the title of his text is taken directly from a Holmes

story,<sup>13</sup> placing Conan Doyle's detective at the center of not only Christopher's experience of the world but also the reader's experience of Christopher's world; the character is a common point of reference for both Christopher and the reader.

This literary touchstone creates a second use for Sherlock Holmes regarding disability narrative; instead of suggesting that the detective himself is disabled, Haddon uses readers' understanding of the character's highly logical mind to help them understand Christopher. The structure of the story itself, an enactment of the ratiocinative detective genre, initially begins as a "murder mystery"—a somewhat nonspecific genre—but from the beginning the title of the novel establishes the primary source for this model. Christopher does not mention other detectives or other mysteries, making Holmes the center of his understanding of "murder mystery" as a form. In his discussion of Christopher's dependence on the genre, Stephan Frießman recognizes the importance of genre writing as a cultural tool:

The use of a genre template for emplotment—the murder mystery novel, that is—illustrates another important point. Cognitive instruments, as they are understood here, are generally cultural techniques. The cultural model allows the narrator to emplot his experience into a story. Christopher orients himself by the cultural models he knows, since murder mystery novels are the only fictions he likes. (415)

The recognition that the young man "orients himself" with specific cultural models establishes the need for such tools in the organization and understanding of experience and implicitly recognizes the prominence of Holmes as such a model. Frießman presents the genre as separate from Conan Doyle's detective, perhaps not wishing to complicate the claims he makes regarding the importance of narrative style as cultural tool.

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<sup>13</sup> The story in question is "The Adventure of Silver Blaze" (1892), originally published in *The Strand* and later collected in *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1894); the curious incident in question is the fact that the dog did not in fact bark, making absence of evidence an evidence of its own.

However, as the material above clarifies, the two cannot be fully separated in *The Curious Incident*; Holmes is the central example of the genre for Christopher, and both the boy's investigative approach and sense of identity is based on his understanding of Conan Doyle's texts.

The utility of Frießman's analysis expands upon addition of the reader's role in recognition of the model. In his discussion of "narrative skills," he asserts that they "are highly relevant for cognitively dealing with social phenomena [and] that they emerge from social interaction and, thus, combine communication and cognition," concluding that "narrative is a profoundly social art" (405). Just as Holmes is an implicit part of the "genre template" discussed above, the reader's ability to understand that template is an understood assumption that makes the interaction of "narrative skills" social. This may seem somewhat obvious, but recognizing the import of audience understanding of any given genre or template provides information regarding the implied audience. That is, the selection of narrative template for emulation, while constrained by the narrator telling the story, provides a way for readers to approach the text—and the more broadly known the template, the more accessible the association. Holmes is not just a useful tool for Christopher, he is a useful tool for Haddon insofar as the great detective is so well-known that almost any audience knows him and can thus understand at least part of Christopher, bridging the gap between character and reader.

Frießman carefully establishes Haddon's use of narrative expectations to provide understanding of Christopher, and Stefania Ciocia finds the genre's creation of such understanding worth careful examination in her discussion of *The Curious Incident* as a postmodern detective story. Alongside its postmodern interest in disability, Ciocia reads



the novel as an example of “postmodern transgressions of the conventions of the classic ‘whodunit,’” wherein the genre’s reliance “on a solid belief in the investigator’s hermeneutical powers and in a firm epistemological hold on reality” is undercut (326). She makes this claim primarily by recognizing that Christopher “sets out to investigate the murder of Wellington, his neighbour’s poodle, only to stumble on the solution quite by accident” (326), which establishes the unreliability of the empirical model of understanding central to the detective genre. Ciocia continues her analysis, asserting that

the order Christopher is trying to superimpose on reality...[with] detective fiction is all but illusory. The erroneousness of the interpretative key[s] that Christopher borrows from his knowledge of the Sherlock Holmes stories is obvious in the several moments of dramatic irony present in the text, when readers realize much earlier than the detective what is really going on. (329)

The reading here is fascinating, as Ciocia suggests that Haddon uses our expectations of Holmes’s approach toward solving mysteries to suggest the difficulty—the *impossibility*—of using it successfully. If empirical observation and careful reasoning do not lead to solved crimes, then we are left with the disconcerting awareness that the very idea of detection is flawed.

The material she uses as evidence, Christopher’s recounting of data that he cannot successfully interpret, complicates her claim somewhat. Ciocia is not interested in a disability studies approach to the text and treats Haddon’s creation of the text primarily as a variation on the postmodern anti-detective story: “Haddon’s choice of a naïve protagonist to champion detective fiction as an aid to our interpretation of reality makes it hard for readers to subscribe to Christopher’s earnest endorsement of this particular narrative filter” (330). The heavy focus on the postmodernist undermining of empiricism is interesting, but it fails to fully engage with the work done by the text. The primary

example of Christopher's failure to understand—his most potent demonstration of naivety—comes from his inability to recognize the various clues that his mother did not in fact die but instead left him and his father. Christopher relates the data to the reader, who can see that the timing of his mother's "death" matches rather well with a neighbor's desertion of his wife, that his father's claim that she died of a heart condition is a metaphor for her no longer loving him and leaving for another man, that other people grow uncomfortable when Christopher mentions his mother's death, and other subtler clues. Christopher's condition includes a form of mind-blindness, in which he has difficulty recognizing the emotional states and motives of other people, making it difficult for him to recognize the importance of his father's (and others') reactions. He trusts his father not to lie to him and considers his father's willingness to tell the truth to be roughly similar to his own difficulties with lying. If, as Ciocia has it, the central concern is one of whether Christopher can parse the clues, she ignores the role of the reader in using the same deductive skills to determine the truth before finding it. The concern here should not be that Christopher is naïve, but that his experience of the world makes it difficult for him to resolve things that neurotypical individuals can do relatively easily—just as he can solve things that are difficult for that same neurotypical audience. The text is not about the absurdity of logic and reasoning; the text is about embodiment and situated knowledge.

In her comparison of *The Curious Incident* with other texts such as *The Name of The Rose* and *If On a Winter's Night a Traveler...*, Ciocia recognizes that all of these texts engage with questions of knowledge and our ability to understand the world around us, but she does a disservice to Haddon's novel in asserting that it is entirely critical of

this process. Her argument that Christopher fails to recognize these details and thus demonstrates the inadequacy of “the interpretive key[s] that Christopher borrows from his knowledge of the Sherlock Holmes stories” falls even flatter upon close inspection of the text’s events. Though Christopher does not immediately understand all of the data put before him, his investigation into the death of his neighbor’s dog frightens the culprit—his father—so much that he confesses to both the murder of the poodle and the lie about his mother’s death. If Christopher does not reach these conclusions on his own, that is no fault of his, as he was prevented from acquiring enough information by the criminal’s confession; his father saw the speed and efficacy of the investigation and sought to prevent it—not the act of a man who believes that knowledge cannot be acquired through careful, objective reasoning and deduction.

All of this presupposes that the inclusion of the detective material solely comments on itself, and as Frießman establishes the text provides a model of understanding accessible to both Christopher and the reader, allowing the reader to perceive the boy and understand him better. Thus although Holmes does not appear here as a disabled character, his approach to the world as described by Conan Doyle and noted by Christopher creates a moment of connection and understanding. The audience’s comfort with a highly logical, somewhat anti-social character transfers to comfort to the autistic character. It should be noted that at no point does Haddon suggest that his audience can completely understand the character of Christopher through their understanding of Holmes; the great detective and the “murder mystery,” ratiocinative format are useful starting points that Haddon can return to when the reader might benefit

from a moment of familiarity, but the character of Christopher Boone is more complex than can be described with a single narrative reference—no matter how persistent.

Haddon's reliance on the Sherlock Holmes genre as a supporting device that helps readers understand Christopher and his condition avoids the narrative of compensation and the "supercrip" stereotype quite handily. Christopher is gifted with mathematics and logic, and one of the main threads of the novel is his desire to take his A-Levels in math, a test roughly synonymous with advanced placement testing in United States high schools. He also wishes to attend a university and, though he recognizes it is not likely, to be an astronaut. Christopher's abilities and desires are not outside the realm of possibility for neurotypical individuals of his age, though he requires more one-on-one attention than most and has significantly focused interest in certain areas. In short, Christopher's talents are not presented as something unattainable through other means—they do not compensate for his difficulties. Seen from this perspective, disability provides a unique outlook from which new ideas might arise, but it does not produce superhuman abilities; just as Holmes always asserts that his powers of deduction are the product of long hours of work and study and are thus theoretically attainable by others, Christopher's situation is one of aptitude and effort.

Despite what many critics have considered a nuanced portrayal of a character on the autism spectrum, *The Curious Incident* is not a perfect representation, perhaps due in part to the use of Holmes. Gyasi Burks-Abbott, himself autistic, critiques the text as a stereotypical representation of autism:

...the author's singular portrayal of autism, a portrayal that fails to capture the nuances and complexities of the autism spectrum, serves to perpetuate stereotypes...Haddon has invoked an archetypal image of autism—one so

resonant, in fact, that readers can recognize Christopher as autistic even though...the word 'autism' never even appears in the book. (291)

While critiquing the text for failing to present a spectrum for autism when it focuses on a single character may be somewhat unfair, Burks-Abbott's assertion recognizes a crucial problem in the text. Despite Haddon's attempt to avoid defining his character with a diagnosis, the actions themselves are diagnostic enough to invoke the disability; this poses problems for a representation of a person and not a disorder, and it may be exacerbated by the inclusion of Holmes. As many traditionally "autistic" characteristics overlap with the detective, and as Haddon uses the detective to help the reader approach understanding Christopher, the traditional nature of these characteristics is reinforced, creating a stereotype for autistic behavior. Though many autistic individuals may have traits in common with Holmes and some of these may even enjoy his stories, the popularity of Haddon's text furthers the stereotype that the association with Holmes creates.

Thus, although Holmes is a useful association, he can only ever be a starting point in the fashion that Haddon invokes him, and in part because of its use of Holmes, Haddon's text must also be an initial suggestion toward understanding autism and not a final determination. Conan Doyle's creation bears so much cultural weight and authority that, even as a smaller part of a larger text, his explanatory power can overwhelm attempts at more subtle considerations. *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time* presents a character whose actions do not fit a neurotypical model of teenage behavior, and in showing Christopher's unique perspective and successes, it argues for greater understanding of those with mental disorders and an embrace of a neurodiverse world. Sherlock Holmes is thus part of this neurodiversity, helping audiences understand that

Instead of pretending that there is hidden away in a vault somewhere a perfectly ‘normal’ brain to which all other brains must be compared...we need to admit that there is no standard brain, just as there is no standard flower, or standard cultural or racial group, and that, in fact, *diversity among brains is just as wonderfully enriching as biodiversity and the diversity among cultures and races*. (Armstrong 3, emphasis in original)

Armstrong’s statement recognizes this need, though the difficulties of implementing it are significant, despite the growing awareness of “neurologically based disorders such as ‘learning disabilities,’ ‘attention deficit hyperactivity disorder,’ and ‘Asperger’s syndrome,’ conditions that were unheard of sixty years ago” (Armstrong 3). The tendency to replace people with diagnoses and treat each diagnosis of the same condition in the same fashion comes directly out of the normative medical models of the nineteenth century, as Lennard Davis demonstrated, and that empirical system also gave rise to the detective; as perhaps *the* cultural symbol of empiricism and deduction, Holmes is thereby implicated in the policing of difference, but now the character can help support an awareness of its value. The tension between these two halves of the detective, caused in no small part by his persistence far beyond his Victorian origins, is something that writers using the character must regularly engage with, even when the character is used as a piece of shared culture.

Armstrong recognizes this concern within the neurodiverse world as well, pointing back toward Moffat and Gatiss’s portrayal in his claim that “neurodiversity should probably include a ‘dark side’ as well. By this I don’t mean only the incredible suffering that others have gone through as a result of many of these conditions but also the suffering they have brought to others” (217). A diverse world is a laudable goal, but not even the staunchest proponent of the value of mental difference would advocate allowing unsupervised psychopaths to do as they please. Despite this, as other authors

have noted above, sociopaths have value, and perhaps there are ways to use the skills they have that are more difficult for others to develop. In response to Osteens critique of the “ideology of bourgeois individualism,” Armstrong argues that “we’ve recognized the need to become a sustainable culture, learning not to throw away objects that can be easily recycled. However, we still need to learn this lesson in the field of human resources” (Armstrong 205). Whether this is possible or not remains an open question, but it is clear that neurological difference is a far more accessible and discussed topic than it has ever been, and it seems likely that further texts exploring the value of thinking differently will appropriate Sherlock Holmes in their explorations and assertions.

## CONCLUSION

To complete this project, I would like to continue an exploration of the concerns regarding the detective's ability to too easily simplify complex narratives by briefly looking at one final text. *Aetheric Mechanics* is a 2008 graphic novella written by Warren Ellis and illustrated by Gianluca Pagliarani, in which a Sherlock Holmes analogue confronts a scientific mystery that could unmake his alternate London. The puzzle behind the criminal acts relies upon intertextuality and a host of fascinating allusions, and the comic invokes the idea of adapted texts alongside a tension regarding part of their nature. *Aetheric Mechanics* is fundamentally anxious about adaptation—not in terms of aesthetics or derivative-ness—but a fear of an explanatory inertia that accompanies the adaptive act. If Holmes remains a potent, reductive force of clarification and understanding, then using him to simplify and contain complex narratives does a great disservice; further, Ellis and Pagliarani suggest that this is not only likely to persist but also extraordinarily difficult to eliminate.

Finding their anxiety begins with awareness of the multiplicity of adaptations that structure our first encounters with the text. Before meeting Sax Raker himself, the text opens with the introduction of its Dr. Watson figure, called Doctor Robert Watcham. Alongside this echo in the character's name, Watcham shares a medical degree and an army background with Watson, and the text begins with him as its narrator—also quite similar to Holmes's partner. Watcham's discharge from the army opens the story, some closing remarks from his journal end it, and his regular observational commentary punctuates the adventure's progress. These similarities connect the doctor to Doyle's



original, but alone they do not fully establish that Watcham is an adaptation of Watson, being too easily shared with other characters and not distinctive enough. But before further clarification of the doctor's associative identity can occur, the text distances itself from Doyle through descriptions of its setting. Watcham's ride across London occurs not by horse-drawn carriage but instead on the platform of a flying machine, the pilot of which describes as "never as smooth as in space" (6). In two pages *Aetheric Mechanics* establishes a setting strikingly different from Doyle's Victorian London, an alternate Britain with flying machines, turn-of-the-century space travel and steampunk aesthetics. The comic challenges the reader's expectations with these shifts, but they remain within accepted norms of science fiction comics—however, Ellis does not leave the narrative within the alternate history genre. As Watcham and the pilot fly across London, a number of clues point toward a text interested more in intertextuality.

In passing, the pilot notes that while his boat—a spaceship—is refitted, "at least he gets some apery under [his] feet" (5), a subtle first indicator of intertextual reference. Readers may gloss over "apergy," treating it as a nonsense science term, but "apergy" was originally coined by Percy Greg in his novel *Across the Zodiac* (1880), in which it referred to a form of anti-gravity. Watcham's conversation with the pilot then strays into recent gossip, including the fact that "Ruritania annexed Grand Fenwick" (8) as a point of concern, given Britain's current war against Ruritania. Ruritania is a fictional country created by Anthony Hope for his novel *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894) and its sequels, and the country's name has become a generic term for fictional countries broadly; Grand Fenwick is another imaginary country, one created by Leonard Wibberley for *The Mouse that Roared* (1955). The annexation of one imaginary land by another is simple business

as usual—they are not fantasies for the characters. Such rapid combination of fictional countries alongside fantastic terminology suggests not just an alternative history but a mashup of the imagination, analogous to Philip Jose Farmer’s Wold Newton materials, wherein a set of alternate-world texts are creatively combined to exist simultaneously in a single new fictional space. Receiving these details, Watcham serves as an expository device through which the multiplicity of intertexts can be layered, and upon arrival at his lodgings his identity as an adaptation of Dr. Watson resolves.

The most distinctive characteristic of Dr. Watson must always be his association with Sherlock Holmes, and the text quickly introduces its analogue for the detective. Called Sax Raker, the character first appears in a drawing room that could easily fit one of Doyle’s stories, and though he does not smoke Holmes’s calabash pipe, he does smoke. More importantly, he immediately performs one of Holmes’s greatest tricks: the impossible deduction. Raker’s demonstration of his deductive prowess parallels Holmes, and when combined with the setting and clear physical resemblance (the lean body and hawk-like nose fitting Doyle’s original description from *A Study in Scarlet*, not to mention Raker’s echo of Sidney Paget’s illustrations, with their high forehead and sharp chin), the reader immediately recognizes that, despite the strange name, this character is meant to evoke Holmes. In this realization, the idea that Watcham must also be Watson is confirmed, and the similarities between the two characters snap into place—free-floating descriptors, “writer,” “retired army officer,” and “doctor” become confirmatory signifiers in the presence of a Holmes analogue. And as this text now features a version of Holmes and Watson, a certain kind of story must follow: a mystery.

This mystery hinges on the adapted nature of the characters here along with the extraordinarily visible intertexts. Ellis prefigures this for the reader with the dissonance between Raker's name and his most obvious fictional parallel, as the association's obviousness becomes less so when scrutinized. The name "Sax" points also toward Sax Rohmer, the pen name of Arthur Henry Sarsfield Ward, who wrote the Fu Manchu series featuring a detective called Denis Nayland Smith—who looked an awful lot like Holmes and whose adventures were recorded by his faithful doctor sidekick, Dr. Petrie. Smith is not the thinker that Holmes is, and Ellis's presentation relies on detective skill far more than Rohmer's creation ever did. But the name goes in other directions as well, with Sexton Blake serving as another Holmes parallel. Blake, a detective also similar in appearance to Holmes, appeared in numerous stories at the same time Doyle was writing his character (though Blake first appeared after Holmes), and the character is specifically referenced in the climax of *Aetheric Mechanics*. Like Holmes, Blake is a detective who relies upon clever thinking—with significantly more fisticuffs—to resolve various mysteries, but unlike Holmes (and Smith), no doctor chronicles his journey. Ellis's presentation of Sax Raker echoes these two detectives while remaining *more* Holmes than either of them.

Accenting the intertextuality of this nominative complexity, Raker's first utterance to Watcham is a paraphrase of H. G. Wells: "...somewhere in Ruritania, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic are studying London's aerial profile" (11). The reference to *War of the Worlds* (1898) could not be clearer, referencing perhaps the single most recognizable line from that text and transforming it for a new situation. On its own, perhaps, this paraphrase might be simple homage, but the variety and volume of these

references implies that more is afoot, that the text does not just adapt a number of different sources but scrutinizes the act of adaptation itself. Within the first third of the text, the reader has been exposed to two fictional nations from separate novels written by separate authors, early science fiction terminology from a third author and a reference to one of the most well-known works of the genre by a fourth, and at least three different authors' exploration of the detective story. There are more textual references to be found, and a careful reader could easily produce an extensive list of such associations in *Aetheric Mechanics*. This hyper-referentiality of the text points at itself, demanding that the reader notice its intertextual meaning and implying that the mystery at its center is more than a simple whodunit.

Turning then to that mystery, the title for which Raker supplies as "The Case of the Man Who Wasn't There," (12), there has been a series of disappearances and deaths all surrounding scientists working in the field of aetheric mechanics—analogous to our quantum physics—some of which are associated with a man who reportedly "flickers" in and out of existence (14). The detecting duo's hunt for clues pile more references atop the stack, while also closely paralleling the ratiocinative detective structure. After surveying the evidence, Raker concludes that the culprit in the disappearances and deaths is most likely this "flickering" man, who has abducted scientists to attempt to repair his condition. Raker is correct, but he only learns this after he, Watcham, and Innana Meyer (an Irene Adler analogue) confront the criminal in his underground lair. There, the flickering man explains his situation: he's a scientist from the future who has been thrust back into an alternate version of the world by a quantum error—which rewrote reality based on the "the stories of Sherlock Holmes, and Sexton Blake, and *The Prisoner of Zenda*, and old

movies and Japanese cartoons” (40). Present at the accident, the information contained in his pocket computer “to go somewhere...had to be integrated with the condition of 1905. The universe had to conserve it all.” (40). Raker recognizes the import of this claim, extrapolating from the culprit’s narrative that “You are saying that we are not real. Figures in a magic lantern show who remained on stage when the light was shut off” (40). At this moment Ellis’s text focuses on the characters’ realization of their own ficticity, thereby confirming the transition from aggressive textual reference to the more specific question of adaptation. Raker and his companions are made from the stuff of fiction, adapted, and the flickering man seeks to set the world right by undoing the quantum error and restoring his reality.

In the face of this situation, Raker ponders his own semi-reality, desperately confronting the idea that “Sax Raker is not real” (42). Instead of submitting to this situation, the detective takes Watcham’s revolver and kills the flickering man, thereby denying any return to “reality.” Sneering down at the corpse, Raker coldly proclaims “You were there after all. And I am quite real after all” (43). The shock of this moment comes partially from the challenge to the readers’ expectations; presented with a version of Holmes, readers might assume that the character would nobly sacrifice himself to save the lives of others and preserve “reality” and “truth.” But Raker’s actions deny that possibility and confront the reader with a fictional creation’s desire to continue existing—giving that existence equal weight with the “real.” This moment is the heart of *Aetheric Mechanics*, and my analysis of Raker’s decision treats it as a science fictional take on the postmodernist “world is text” assertion, accented by the claim that Raker’s action performs.

In some ways, the first is easier to describe, as the ability of the “quantum error” to rewrite reality according to the flickering man’s collection of texts implies overlap between the organization and perception of reality. Echoing Jorge Luis Borges’ “On Exactitude in Science” (1946), the process that reorganizes the world of *Aetheric Mechanics* cannot distinguish between description and existence, between map and territory, and thereby conflates the two. This act implies that one of the fundamental levels of reality—the quantum or aetheric—depends not on some objective truth but on the way reality is described. Science in *Aetheric Mechanics* describes *a* reality, not *the* reality, and other descriptive strategies can replace it if circumstances are right. Perhaps even more telling, the nature of the accident explains the temporal shift of the story, in which a twenty-first century scientist is thrust back to 1905, by suggesting that the quantum effect could only retroactively change the world *from when* it was first conceived. Because in 1905 the idea that “matter tells space how to bend and space tells matter how to move” (39) first came into being, and because that concept is fundamental to the experiment that went awry, the error can only rewire reality around the moment of its inception. The error relies on an idea that must continue to exist and that cannot exist without being described. It cannot erase its origin, because without the awareness of the effect the effect cannot occur. Description orders the real.

This kind of play is part of a long tradition that treats scientific discovery as a text like any other, similar to Borges’s previously noted abuse of geography or the more general postmodern disdain for master narratives. As such it is interesting if somewhat rote; however, the addition of an adaptation aware of its second-hand nature re-energizes the approach. The actions of Raker are, in part, a claim for equality of texts on a basic,

fundamental level, and as an adapted character, Raker acts not only as fiction fighting the tyranny of science narratives but also as an adaptation refusing to submit to originary material. This is not simply Sherlock Holmes making a claim for continued existence but a character that echoes Holmes, that references him, and as an analogue, his actions signify the importance of the adapted work more than had Ellis called him Holmes. The violence done by Raker is performed not *as* Holmes but *through* him, an extension and thus a claim for the value of the continuation and expansion of character and narrative.

But would this work if Raker were *not* an analogue of Doyle's detective? Perhaps, though the resonances would be entirely different; instead of actions attributed to a character that is still, more than a century after creation, an identifiable, regularly referenced, cultural touchstone, similar action from nearly any other fictional character would appear as a plea for continued existence. Imagine a Spring-heeled Jack, a Raffles, or a Fantomas murdering the flickering man in order to continue their existence. Such a decision would be a case of protesting too much, a demand for relevance long after having been largely forgotten. That ending would be pathetic, perhaps provoking sympathy and fond thoughts of discarded texts from the past, but Raker-as-Holmes is not a forgotten figure from a discarded tale, and though the character carries with him the weight of the intertexts mentioned above, those references form a fraction of the character's substance. Certainly, Raker acts for all adaptations everywhere in killing the flickering man, asserting the value of secondary texts and continuing stories, but that is only part of the truth. The other, more disturbing part is *Aetheric Mechanics'* claim that narratives compete with each other, that old, ingrained stories can override newer,

perhaps more interesting tales, and that Sherlock Holmes is more potent—and more vicious—than other narratives.

The sense that ideas and stories must compete with each other is not regularly discussed in literary studies without recourse to other fields, and perhaps a conference on adaptation is the perfect setting to confront this reality; of the many texts that are produced, only some manage to thrive after being thrust into any cultural idea-space. *Aetheric Mechanics* presents a conflict between two visions, two descriptions, and though we may be somewhat content to treat all information as a form of narrative, examining conflict between competing narratives is not often our focus. However, it *is* a central aspect of other, non-literary studies approaches to the propagation of ideas, such as memetics. Perhaps no longer relevant as a science, memetics explores cultural production through the lens of Darwin, creating an analogy between genes and ideas, or memes, that propagate through a culture. Susan Blackmore, one of memetics' champions, writes that the meme is the imitation of something, a recreation of an idea or act that can pass along to others (Blackmore 4); reviewing the concept, Jeremy Burman, explains further that replication is the heart of the meme (Burman 80). Ideas or memes replicate, spread, and mutate—echoing the action of genes. As a science, memetics failed to produce results because of “the intricacy of social phenomena...[and] understanding the effects of different mechanisms requires a finer tool than that of discursive analogy,” according to Bruce Edmonds, in one of the last papers published in the *Journal of Memetics* (2006). But *as* a discursive analogy, it remains useful when thinking about adaptation, providing a basis for investigating the recurrence and transformation of certain texts.



The stakes of this replication process come from understanding that memes compete “for the same limited processing capacity of the brain” (Blackmore 40). With a finite amount of available thinking power, only certain ideas are able to persist, making awareness of which were effective a central question. It should be noted that Blackmore and her fellow memeticists did not argue that this action benefited the *best* or most *useful* ideas, but instead those memes that replicated and spread most effectively (Blackmore 7). She argues that while psychology provides some answers to which memes spread and which do not, “the tricks [memes] exploit, the ways they group together and the general processes of memetic evolution that favour [sic] some memes over others” (16) is an area deserving of study. Expanding on this in his essay on cultural evolution, Kim Sterelny suggests that “information of the right type—salient and memorable—should be highly transmissible” (143), all of which points back toward adaptation. In the memetic frame, adaptations are a recurrence of an idea—perhaps mutated—in a new space; they imply continuity and lineage, and as a particular narrative recurs it comes up against other concepts that challenge its position in the mind.

At the end of *Aetheric Mechanics*, Raker’s decision to shoot the flickering man is a demonstration of memetic confrontation: the Holmesian narrative versus the quantum science narrative—and as readers, we are positioned to see a version of this confrontation play out. In killing the flickering man, Raker-as-Holmes “wins,” and we must backtrack to questions of why. According to the memetic model, salience and memorability are two central pillars of persistence, and *Aetheric Mechanics* supports this on both counts. It is hard to envision a more memorable figure than that of Holmes, and the appearance and mannerisms of Raker, analogue and composite though he may be, carry the weight of

Holmes for the reader; in contrast, the flickering man has no prior hold, no continuing presence. Though his description of the state of the world seems somewhat plausible, it is complex and difficult to understand, filled with logical gaps—porous, much like himself. Presented as choice, the “reality” of the Holmes analogue is more substantial than that described by the flickering man; if forced to decide, which would we believe? The half-invisible man with his mad plots and bizarre science, or the rational, solid Raker who reminds us so much of the heroic Sherlock Holmes? The choice seems impossibly easy; that which is salient, that which is memorable, will be privileged over the difficult and esoteric.

Positioned outside the conflict, we are privileged with a sense that the flickering man represents the “truth” and is killed by a fiction, that a complicated “real” is potentially vulnerable to a simpler fiction. There is an element of caution to this story, since *Aetheric Mechanics* ends with the likely destruction of England by the forces of Ruritania—an avoidable fate, had Raker accepted his fictionality. If we believe that the world exists in a certain way, we are primed to believe in things that are not “true” because of their “fit” with the limits of our understanding. Adaptation can reinforce this belief, acting as an efficacious meme that provides a shortcut for understanding the world around us, a replicating concept that, once fully realized, is very hard to stop. If we are not critically aware of our ideas, with the often comfortable ways in which we approach the reality around us, we may then overlook potential catastrophe. Perhaps in the end, *Aetheric Mechanics* provides a corollary to the old Arthur C. Clarke idea that “any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic,” as science even now seems to ride the edge of intelligibility that it begins to seem magical. The quantum

effects abused by the flickering man are incredibly complex and often counter-intuitive, perhaps making them as difficult to trust as a story—a magical fairy tale. And though no one believes in magic, everyone believes in Sherlock Holmes.

Here at the end, then, we have a conundrum. Texts have deployed Holmes to do very interesting things—expanding the character’s approach to the world, repurposing his characteristics, and inviting conversations about newly relevant topics. These uses of Conan Doyle’s detective seem quite positive, but they must be put up against the possibility that Holmes is not a sufficiently complex device for full representation of the topics he appears alongside. In chapter four, Holmes undermines the complexity of history, offering a single, simple narrative in place of the twisting realities of the Tibetan-Chinese relationship. In chapter five, he provides a path toward understanding a single, neurologically unique character, but that path could (and has) become well-worn by those looking to explain an entire range of mental difference. These are significantly less positive developments, and it is fear of this kind of simplified control that motivated Ellis and Pagliarani’s adaptation. Their pastiche—though never called Holmes—points specifically at the power that an idea as pervasive and culturally robust as Conan Doyle’s detective can have over the imagination.

With this in mind, the possible fate of the character as a trademarked and thus limited version of himself begins to seem somewhat encouraging. If Holmes is trapped in Victorian or Edwardian England, forced into a kind of character stasis, then he seems less potent as an explanatory tool—especially as technology and its attendant cultural shifts further distance contemporary existence from that of the nineteenth century. In this vision of the detective’s future, he might remain an interesting side-note or a touchstone for

certain kinds of historical fictions, but might lose some of his value for contemporary audiences. I cannot help but feel that this fate would be a net loss, despite Ellis and Pagliarani's worries and the various ways that Holmes constrains our understanding of difficult issues and concerns. We cannot deny these concerns, but the marvelous flexibility of Conan Doyle's creation—and the expansion of his epistemological approach by King—suggests a middle path. Awareness of Holmes's limitations can temper the more aggressive explanations he provides, keeping the idea of Holmes alive and productive, so long as texts featuring him are approached critically.

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