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**A SCANDAL ON SCREEN:**

**A GENDERED READING OF ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE'S**

**CHARACTERS IN BBC'S *SHERLOCK* AND CBS'S *ELEMENTARY***

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## Introduction: The serialised Sherlock Holmes

What I want to call attention to is the blatant and much overlooked loss of Victorian female characters' agency that takes place in the process of 'updating' Victorian texts in contemporary screen adaptations through the – now almost routine – 'sexing up' of the proverbially prudish Victorians.  
Primorac (2013: 90)

Our cinema and television culture seems to be going through a period in which adaptation occupies an important and unapologetic space. These adaptations are very much wide ranging in the variety of their original source texts: young adult fiction (*The Hunger Games* trilogy (2012–)), comic books (*The Avengers* (2012) and all its related movies), fantasy fiction (*The Hobbit* (2012–)) and children's fiction (*Maleficent* (2014)), to name only a few recent examples. The adaptation of a wide variety of stories, however, has not diminished the importance of the adaptations of classic literary texts, particularly those of the nineteenth century such as Jane Austen, Charles Dickens or Charlotte Brontë. As Peter Brooke explains, "[t]he last twenty years have also seen any number of adaptations of literary texts (...) These examples represent less "more of the same" than *more* of the same; that is to say, the emergence of a more intensively palimpsestic, ironic, and self-reflexive film culture." (Brooker 2007: 110 [emphasis in original]). This film and TV culture is increasingly departing from the notion that ideally an adaptation must simply take an original text and reproduces it in a new medium with as little variation as possible.

It is in this context that the most famous Victorian detective, Sherlock Holmes, has been re-imagined and incarnated in many adaptations in film and television. The detective can boast of a long list of incarnations during the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century, including but certainly not limited to: "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes" (1939),

*The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1959), *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* (1976) and *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) on the big screen; on television one of the best remembered adaptations is the Granada Television series including *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1984-1985), *Sherlock* (2010–), and the most recent addition, *Elementary* (2012–)<sup>1</sup>. In the last years, the most influential and popular renditions have undoubtedly been Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011) and BBC's *Sherlock*. In one form or another, all these adaptations follow the same basic pattern; the genius detective Sherlock Holmes solves crimes and mysteries using his uncommon power of deduction with the assistance of his friend Dr John Watson. *Sherlock*, however, has become for many younger viewers their adaptation of reference and has amassed a substantial amount of fans since its first season aired in 2010.

The popularity of *Sherlock* can be partly attributed, among other factors to the reboot of the popular television series *Doctor Who* (2005–)<sup>2</sup> through their common co-producer and co-writer Steven Moffat, and to its performers Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman (who play Sherlock Holmes and John Watson respectively), who have seen their popularity dramatically increased after these roles. The series adapts Sherlock Holmes' adventures to 21<sup>st</sup> century London and starts with the protagonists' first meeting, in which it is agreed that the Afghanistan veteran doctor John Watson and the private detective and police counsellor Sherlock Holmes will share the famous address 221B Baker Street so that both can afford living in central London. Besides his natural ability to make deductions, this updated Sherlock Holmes uses all the latest

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<sup>1</sup> A list with 200 Sherlock Holmes adaptations can be found at the Internet Movie Database <<http://www.imdb.com/find?q=sherlock+holmes&s=tt>>

<sup>2</sup> The original British television series, following the adventures of the Doctor, an alien who travels the universe having adventures with his companions, aired from 1963 to 1989. In 2005 a new incarnation of the Doctor was brought back to television.

technologies to solve his cases; he is depicted as unpopular with most people in his acquaintance, selfish and generally disobedient of any rules, but capable of catching even the greatest criminals and truthfully attached to John Watson.

The series reached such a high level of popularity that the American television network CBS had talks with its producers to make an American version, an offer that was refused<sup>3</sup>. This refusal prompted the creation of what would become *Elementary* (2012–), CBS's own take on a 21<sup>st</sup> century Sherlock Holmes. Despite the initial concerns about plagiarism, which I address in Chapter 2, *Elementary* convincingly offers a distinct take of the original stories from the British one. *Elementary* brings a British Sherlock Holmes (Jonny Lee Miller) to New York City after he has completed a drug desintoxication program in a facility close to the city. His wealthy father hires the ex-surgeon Joan Watson (Lucy Liu) to be his sober companion for a period of six weeks. As the series progresses, it becomes apparent that Watson is interested and has the potential to become a private detective, and after her contract is finished, Holmes makes her an offer to train her so that she can become his partner in detection/crime investigation.

Both the original stories and its adaptations have been analysed and discussed by a multitude of academic specialists from many different perspectives. *Sherlock* has amassed its own body of academic work since it first aired in 2010: there is work on Holmes and Watson's masculinities in relation to its tradition (Lavigne 2013), the homoerotic readings that are a particular highlight of *Sherlock* (Thomas 2012), the sexualisation of Sherlock Holmes (Graham and Garlen 2012) or the importance of

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<sup>3</sup> The exact reasons for this refusal remain unclear, but producer Sue Vertue tweeted the following after CBS' announcement of *Elementary*: "Mmm interesting CBS, I'm surprised no one has thought of making a modern day version of Sherlock before, oh hang on, we have!" (In Lynette Porter 2012: 125). This, in addition to the zeal that *Sherlock* representatives expressed towards their show's copyright and originality, suggest fear of a badly done adaptation as the possible motive.

Sherlock Holmes in adaptations as part of popular culture (Polasek 2012, Poore 2012). There have been, however, no relevant academic contributions with a focus on *Elementary*, and those who mention the series do so only in passing on the basis of the information available before it started airing on television (Polasek 2013, Porter 2012, Primorac 2013). While it is early to establish what impact *Elementary* will have on the academic world of Sherlock Holmes, it seems clear that *Sherlock* has occupied a central place in the study of Sherlock Holmes adaptations. For all the research done about Sherlockian adaptations, however, there is a lack of work centred on the female characters in the stories, particularly Irene Adler, one of the most iconic women within the Sherlock Holmes world. Irene Adler and her story arc, uncommon for a woman in Victorian times (as we will see in Chapter 1) offers a perfect study case on gender conventions, and in the case of her adaptations, on how adapters re-imagine a character that does not neatly fit restricting patriarchal narratives.

This lack of research with a focus on the women in Arthur Conan Doyle's stories combined with the general acceptance in many internet fan spheres of the idea that *Sherlock's* adaptation of Irene Adler presents a perfect example of liberation and freedom for women, led me to some of the research questions that have motivated this dissertation. Is the new incarnation of Adler so liberated and progressive? How does her sexuality affect her character? How does she embody general trends in the series? As Primorac suggests in the quotation that opens this Introduction, there are many things happening under the external appearance of freedom of characters like Irene Adler, suggesting that she is not as liberated as we might be initially led to believe. *Elementary* also offers its own take on 21<sup>st</sup> century Irene Adler, an Adler that initially seems as trapped in the roles assigned to her by the men in her life as any Victorian woman. However, that situation is reversed and Adler shows a level of agency that contrasts

with *Sherlock*'s empty display of freedom. Besides Adler's character, there also exists the common notion in many internet spaces that *Sherlock*'s portrayal of Holmes and Watson's partnership in relation to its homoerotic subtext makes the show a progressive media product. In direct contrast, *Elementary* was considered more conservative and traditional for its choice to change Watson from man to woman, and thus supposedly erasing the possibility of eliciting such homoerotic readings from the audience. While these criticisms have generally disappeared as *Elementary*'s first season progressed, there is still the general notion that *Sherlock* is as a whole a progressive and inclusive show. This, as I'll argue, is quite debatable.

Taking all these ideas into account, the present dissertation defends that although *Sherlock* appears to be an inclusive and progressive show, it is in fact frequently conservative in the ideologies behind the delineation of certain characters and their relationships with each other. On the other hand, *Elementary* consistently offers characters and storylines that are commonly gender-inclusive and progressive, particularly within the latest adaptations of Sherlock Holmes. For the purposes of this dissertation I understand and use these terms, inclusive and progressive, as characteristic of a text that is aware of the inequalities in representation of certain marginalised groups, such as women, people of colour, disabled people, etc. and who actively try to represent them in an equal and non-stereotyped way.

In this dissertation I will focus the analysis on the two aspects already mentioned above: Irene Adler's characterisation, and Holmes and Watson's relationship. My method for analysis is based on contrasting episodes from both shows based on the same original story by Arthur Conan Doyle. "A Scandal in Bohemia", the short story in which Adler appears, has been adapted as "A Scandal in Belgravia" in *Sherlock* (2010–) and as the episodes "The Woman" and "Heroine" in *Elementary* (2012–). As they share

the same source text, this analysis will be able to focus on the kind of choices that were made that deviate from the original and on the reasons for those choices.

The theoretical framework used to carry out this research is a combination of textual analysis and Gender Studies. Many parts of my work are based on the textual analysis of the main texts (*Sherlock* and *Elementary*) and their source text (“A Scandal in Bohemia”) in order to engage in a critical dialogue with them. A critical response needs to pay attention to the text as it stands in order to produce a critique that is grounded on the evidence that it provides. However, for the texts discussed in this dissertation, textual analyses become insufficient. Robert Stam once wrote that “a single novelistic text comprises a series of verbal signals that can trigger a plethora of possible readings. An open structure, constantly reworked and reinterpreted by a boundless context, the text feeds on and is fed into an infinitely permutating intertext, seen through ever-shifting grids of interpretation.” (Stam 2005b: 15). In any adaptation context and the constant interpretation and rewriting of both the source text and its preceding adaptations are essential. This is particularly true in such a popular and revisited story like that of Sherlock Holmes. It is for this reason that while textual analysis is essential, cultural context and extra-textual information, such as statements made by the different adapters of the texts, are included in the analysis. Cultural products do not exist in a vacuum and it is important to incorporate information outside the text itself to fully understand it.

This dissertation is divided into an introduction, two chapters and the conclusion. Both chapters follow a parallel structure, with the same sub-sections in general terms: one devoted to adaptation, the second to Irene Adler and the third to Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson’s relationship. Chapter 1, centred on *Sherlock*, will offer a summary of the original short story “A Scandal in Bohemia” and its plot

adaptation in “A Scandal in Belgravia”. Irene Adler’s sexualisation, loss of agency and erasure as a bisexual individual will be discussed, followed by an analysis of how Holmes and Watson’s relationship relates to the show’s ‘queerbaiting’ writing (a concept to be defined in the chapter). Chapter 2, focused on *Elementary*, will pay attention first to the issue of adapting for popular television and American audiences, next to Irene Adler’s agency and lack of subordination, and finally to her relationship with Sherlock Holmes and the reasons for her defeat. The final part of the chapter will look at Joan Watson’s character, the implications of her gender in the show, her lack of sexualisation, her identification with the audience and her relationship with Sherlock Holmes and its effects on both, but particularly on Holmes’ new masculinity.

I would like to close this introduction with the reasons that brought me to write this dissertation. As my final project in secondary school, back in 2008, I did my research on the reasons why texts as different as *Harry Potter* and *The Lord of the Rings* seemed to have such a similar fanbase and popularity. I had the belief then as I do now that it is important to understand better and be critical with those texts that enjoy great popularity, as they often contain clues of our society’s values and cultural perceptions. With this belief in mind I decided to venture into the world of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson and try to find out what exactly the early 21<sup>st</sup> century is pouring into these stories. Ultimately, I hope my dissertation may serve a purpose beyond the academic spheres and that, in its own small scale, it can contribute to teach potential audiences to approach popular TV shows in a more critical spirit.

## **Chapter 1: *Sherlock*: False liberation and audience baiting**

### **1.1. Fidelity and (re)writing: Choices and context in adaptation**

According to Robert Stam, “[a] filmic adaptation is automatically different and original due to the change of medium” (2005a: 17). This simple statement can hardly be refuted; it is simply impossible to reproduce a text that uses words, such as a novel, exactly in the same manner when it is adapted to an audiovisual medium. The changes and decisions that an adapter must necessarily make grant any adaptation both its difference and originality. However, for many years adaptation studies focused on the notion of “ ‘fidelity’ ”, which is still the focus of many non-academic reviews. It is not the object of the following dissertation to determine whether the adaptations studied here adhere to a strict understanding of fidelity, but to pay attention “to specific dialogical responses, to ‘readings’ and ‘critiques’ and ‘interpretations’ and ‘rewritings’ of source novels, in analyses which always take into account the inevitable gaps and transformations in the passage across very different media and materials of expression” (Stam 2005b: 5). That is, the aim of the discussion is not to question whether departures from the original text are necessary or not; what is essential is to analyse why these changes happen and what are their implications and consequences.

When analysing an adapted text, it is important to consider and understand the ideological position of the adapter(s). While intentionality is never enough by itself for textual analysis, the circumstances and wishes of the creator have an impact on the decisions taken in the process of making an adaptation. In her book *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon observes about adapters that “they not only interpret that work but in so doing they also take a position on it” (2006: 92). She adds that:

In the act of adapting, choices are made based on many factors, as we have seen, including genre or medium conventions, political engagement, and personal as well as an interpretative context that is ideological, social, historical cultural, personal, and aesthetic. And that context is made accessible to us later in two ways. First, the text bears the marks of these choices, marks that betray the assumptions of the creator—at the very least insofar as those assumptions can be inferred from the text. (2006: 108)

First I would like to draw attention to the fact that everything that happens in a text such as a novel, a television series, a radio dramatisation or a film is a *choice* made by an author. It is sometimes easy to forget when analysing a text that events that occur do not simply happen, but that there is an active will behind everything that constitutes the text. This is particularly so in texts which require a great money investment, like a film or television series, as every single expense must be based on a justified decision. Hutcheon also notes that the first place to look for these choices and the possible reasons behind them is the finished text. The characters' actions and words, the choice of setting, the appearance of the protagonist versus the villain, the soundtrack... all these elements provide the audience of an audiovisual production, such as the ones that will be analysed here, with a set of elements that together will help them create at least one layer of context, enough for the audiences to follow the story's plot. However, that is frequently not enough:

(...) Second, and more obvious, is the fact that extratextual statements of intent and motive often do exist to round our sense of context of creation. Of course, these statements can and must be confronted with the actual textual results: as many have rightly insisted, intending to do something is not necessarily the same thing as achieving it. (Hutcheon 2006: 108-9)

An adapter is both a reader of the original text and a creator of a new one. An adapter is also an individual, with their<sup>4</sup> own personal motivations and desires, and a representative of a larger socio-cultural historical context. It is particularly so in the case of an adaptation of an original work distant in time from that of the adapter. It is for

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<sup>4</sup> While gendered language is not the focus of this dissertation, it is nonetheless important and in line with the general purpose of this work to offer a text in which gender assumptions are questioned. It is for this reason that gender neutral and inclusive language is used where appropriate.

these reasons that, despite the divergent opinions about the role of the author in textual analysis, for the purposes of this dissertation I will consider the adapter's authorial interpretation and intent, whenever this is documented, alongside with the texts themselves to better understand the differences and motives in gender representation in the adapted works I here discuss.

## **1.2. Irene Adler: Loss of agency in apparent freedom**

The first text we need to read is the original short story by Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891). In this story Sherlock Holmes is asked to recover sensitive material, evidence of the romantic relationship of the king of Bohemia and an American opera singer, Irene Adler. As the king himself relates to Sherlock Holmes, in the course of their love affair Irene retained a number of personal mementos supposedly for blackmail purposes which she refuses to hand back. Sherlock Holmes is hired to recover the incriminating pictures and letters, and in the process of finding out where she keeps them, he attends her wedding to an Englishman, Godfrey Norton. The plan he devises to find the photographs, however, fails. When he believes Adler trapped, and he, Watson and the king turn up at her house to get the missing evidence of the affair, they discover that Adler has not only left with her new husband, but has also left behind a letter for Sherlock Holmes. In it she explains how she realised he was following her and disguised herself to discover his plans; then, fearing discovery by Holmes, she decided to leave England instantly. She also offers an alternative point of view to the king's account of their relationship, hinting at the dangerous power imbalance between them and how she kept the photographs and letters as a way to protect herself from any threats from the king. We know that before contacting Sherlock Holmes, the king of

Bohemia tried five times to have the photographs stolen from her, once diverting her luggage from her, twice more waylaying her in the streets, and twice again ransacking her house. These criminal methods make it obvious that the king is not averse to using violence to achieve his goals and that Irene is in real danger. The narrator, Dr Watson as usual, explains the special consideration Holmes has for Irene Adler from the moment of his failure onwards, and how he considers her *the* woman, as she has been the only one capable of defeating him. Despite the fact that it is never stated that Holmes has any feelings for Irene Adler, and that she marries for love in the original short story, there have been a number of adaptations that have portrayed their relationship as a romantic one, including Guy Ritchie's films (*Sherlock Holmes* 2009, *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* 2011), the first of which preceded the first season of *Sherlock* by only one year.

In general terms, the episode "A Scandal in Belgravia" is presented as an update of Conan Doyle's stories to 21st century London: the dominatrix Irene Adler has in her possession compromising photographs of an important woman of the British royal family, and Sherlock Holmes is summoned to Buckingham Palace and asked to retrieve the pictures. Sometime after failing to get the evidence from Irene Adler, she asks Holmes for help as she is threatened by powerful groups for the information she holds locked in her mobile phone. Sherlock, though, eventually guesses her password, retrieves the pictures and thus prevents her from getting the money and privileges she was trying to blackmail out of the British government. At the end of the episode, Watson breaks the news to Sherlock that Irene Adler has been killed, but the last scene shows Sherlock saving her and stopping her execution by a terrorist cell in, unexpectedly, Karachi, Pakistan.

It is interesting to note the cultural connection between London's district of Belgravia with the royalty of the country and wealthiest, although it is now most often occupied by embassies and wealthy foreigners. While it is never explicitly said who it is that hires Irene Adler's services, it is heavily hinted that some member/s of England's royalty are the ones that meet with her and cause the "scandal in Belgravia".

In terms of gender representation, Irene Adler is presented to the audience as an empowered, strong woman who seems to fully accept her femininity and sexuality and who is able to use it to achieve her goals. In her first encounter with Sherlock, we see her deciding what to wear with the help of her assistant Kate and having the following exchange in her dressing room after considering many provocative outfits: "Kate: What are you gonna wear? Adler: My battle dress" ("A Scandal in Belgravia" 2012). The next time we see Adler, we discover what her battledress consists of: she parades stark naked in front of Sherlock, trying to confuse him and prevent him from making any deductions from her appearance as he usually does. She proves to be highly intelligent and competent as she engages Sherlock in a game of wit recreating one of Sherlock's cases trying to deduce how the victim died. Their encounter is, however, soon interrupted by a group of American men, later identified as CIA agents, who want to get the contents of her safe. Sherlock is pressured into guessing its password, which consists of Adler's body measurements ("Adler: I'd tell you the code right now but you know what? I already have" ("A Scandal in Belgravia" 2012). After they have either left unconscious or killed their attackers, Adler drugs Sherlock to recover her mobile phone, which was the content of the safe and where she keeps all her compromising evidence, and makes her escape, not before telling him "This is how I want you to remember me. The woman who beat you" ("A Scandal in Belgravia" 2012).

Unlike what happens in the original short story, in the BBC adaptation Irene Adler does not have any romantic relationship with those who are trying to steal the photos from her nor does she marry anyone, and yet, up to this point her story might seem to be simply an update of the original text. However, the Irene Adler of “A Scandal in Belgravia” goes beyond the one in the original short story. She spends some months flirting with Sherlock via texting and eventually sends Sherlock her own password-protected mobile phone for safekeeping hours before her body is found. However, sometime later she is revealed to be alive and asks for her phone back. After more flirtation with Sherlock, he discovers the meaning of a code that is later revealed to be instrumental for a terrorist attack, which gives her leverage against the British government to get protection and a list of demands. Just before she gets these demands satisfied, though, she reveals that all her plots have been carefully guided by arch-villain Jim Moriarty, which seems to stimulate Sherlock to discover her phone password (“I AM S H E R LOCKED”), exposing that she did have feelings for him. After this, as she has become defenceless, we see her in one last scene being rescued by Sherlock from her impending beheading.

One of the main traits in Irene Adler’s updated characterisation is her profession as a dominatrix for the upper-classes, particularly women. The figure of the dominatrix is rarely given any depth in popular culture representation. One of the only dominatrices on television that is developed beyond a simple stereotype is *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*’s Lady Heather. In fact, the show’s core structure is a loose update of the Sherlock Holmes stories. Gil Grissom, the main character, is a scientist: a highly logical, observing, introverted man, who solves crimes using his own capacity of deduction with the help of the latest technological advances in forensic medicine. He has an archenemy, Paul Millander, who has the same initials as the original Professor

Moriarty. Lady Heather is then a new Irene Adler, also in a complex relationship with the story's hero, at times purely sexual, others more intimate and confidential. While her character is still marked with some of the damaging stereotypes connected to sex workers (Lavigne 2009: 394), she is granted both a guilt-free control of her own sexuality and a complexity as a person beyond her work, particularly as she reappears in later seasons<sup>5</sup>. *Sherlock's* Irene Adler, nonetheless, differs from Lady Heather in the lack of complexity of her motivations and the resolution of her struggles. Whereas *CSI* tries to characterise Lady Heather as the person beyond the *femme fatale* trope, Irene Adler is confined precisely within the limitations of this same trope, with her only deviance from it (having romantic feelings for Sherlock) as the reason of her failure.

Earlier on this chapter I stated the importance of the adapter in the process of creating a new work. We cannot determine whether characters based on Irene Adler such as Lady Heather had an influence on the writing of *Sherlock's* "A Scandal in Belgravia" and it is also difficult to assess to which extent previous direct adaptations of Doyle's stories (like Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes*) affected the creation of *Sherlock's* Adler. However, we do have information on decisions made for Adler given by the show writer and executive producer Steven Moffat, also known for his work on the British television show *Doctor Who* (2005–). In an interview for *Think Progress* published in May 2012, Moffat reveals his stance on Irene Adler in relation to the canonical character:

When you're looking at what causes a scandal in Bohemia as opposed to Belgravia, you have to up the ante a bit, and Irene Adler doesn't really qualify as a bad girl anymore. She's an opera singer who married a man and moved house, as far as I can see. As far as deadly *femme fatales* go, she was a little bit on the limited side. I remember when I was reading that story as a kid, Sherlock goes on and on about The Woman, the only one who ever beat him, and you're thinking, he's had better

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<sup>5</sup> Lady Heather appears originally in season two, but she reappears in seasons three, six, seven, nine and eleven. In the last two seasons, interestingly, she has abandoned her life as a dominatrix and has become a sex therapist.

villains than this. And then you click: he fancies her, doesn't he? That's what it's about. (in Rosenberg 2012: web)

From these comments one can argue that Moffat's interpretation of Irene Adler in the original is that of an attempted *femme fatale*, one who should be categorised next to the other villains in Holmes' adventures, and that he will translate that into his own version of the character. However, is Irene Adler a *femme fatale*? And equally importantly, is she a villain? I'll argue that actually she is neither.

According to Rebecca Stott, the *femme fatale* is "a powerful and a threatening figure, bearing a sexuality that is perceived to be rapacious, or fatal to her male partners" (1992: viii). In Doyle's short story, sexuality is never explicitly mentioned, and Irene Adler is referred to as an adventuress, "[a] woman who seeks social and financial advancement by unscrupulous means" (*The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language* 2009: website). The exact nature and extent of her relationship with the king of Bohemia is not explicitly stated in the story, that is whether their relationship was purely sexual, if there was a romantic attachment, how important that was or who was the real seducer, as Irene Adler's letter shakes the reader's trust in the king as a reliable narrator of their past together. Arthur Conan Doyle created an ambiguous and questionable adventuress, whose motives and intentions towards the king range from eagerness to gain power to mere desire to protect herself from powerful characters depending on whose words we get to read. Irene Adler becomes an atypical character as Doyle writes her beyond his time's idea of the *femme fatale*, and of women in general who many believed to be "driven by nature to depredate the male, and hence creatures who were, even if only in medical terms, dangerous to a man's health even when they were virtuous, submissive, monogamous wives" (Dijkstra 1996:47). That is, the *femme fatale* appears to be a woman who exteriorized her nature as a woman more

intensely than other women, but nonetheless that nature was within every single woman, turning any act beyond submission into proof of this nature. Whatever her definition may be, reducing her complex character and story to one of a hypersexual and objectified *femme fatale*, like *Sherlock's* Irene Adler, reveals the very specific interpretation that Steven Moffat made of the original source and offers the audience a prime example of the actually conservative way in which gender and its representation are handled in the series.

The instability and complexity of the narratives imposed on women is best shown at the end of the original short story with the letter for Sherlock Holmes written by Irene Adler. While this is ambiguous, it provides many hints to turn upside down the reader's conception that she is a seductress who only wants to profit from her past relationship with the king:

I love and am loved by a better man than he. The king may do what he will without hindrance from one he has cruelly wronged. I keep it only to safeguard myself, and *preserve a weapon which will always secure me from any steps which he might take in the future.* (Doyle 1996: 26 [emphasis added])

Irene Adler is known for her intelligence, as she is able to defeat Sherlock Holmes. The king also tells Holmes "that her word is inviolate" (Doyle 1996: 27), suggesting that Adler is an honest person, and that her words can be trusted. Sherlock Holmes' words strongly suggest as well that he indeed believes her words and that "From what I have seen of the lady, she seems indeed to be on a very different level to your majesty," he said coldly" (Doyle 1996: 27), indicating that now he relies more on her narration than on the king's.

And yet, Moffat's understanding of her character coincides with what the king of Bohemia would like Sherlock, and in turn the reader, to believe. His own interpretation

of the source text reduces Adler to a failed *femme fatale* and object of desire, as she does not fit the roles of either villain or seductress. In doing so, he misses the point of her story arc and that influences heavily what kind of Irene Adler we see on screen.

It is precisely Adler's relationship with Sherlock and their interaction which makes more evident this character's simplification. The first appearances of Irene Adler are designed to convince the audience of her personal strength and sexual liberation. The first time she is seen on-screen she has a woman, presumably a member of the British Royal family, tied up in her bed. When she reappears after her faked death, she suggests that John Watson has a romantic relationship with Sherlock to which he responds: "John: Who ... who the hell knows about Sherlock Holmes, but – for the record – if anyone out there still cares, I'm not actually gay. Adler: Well, I am. Look at us both." ("A Scandal in Belgravia" 2012). However, despite her declaration, we also know that some of her clients are men, as she mentions the man who helped her falsify her death certificate "I know what he likes, and I needed to disappear." ("A Scandal in Belgravia" 2012). It is understood then that despite her own sexual preferences, she has sex with people of all genders. It is strange then, that the show writers did not give her the label of bisexual, as that would represent better what we are told and see about her. We have an explanation, actually, by Steven Moffat regarding the aforementioned scene:

But I think that whole scene, when Irene Adler has to say she's mostly gay, she has had relationships with men as well, it's not what it's about. Sherlock Holmes is indifferent to sex. So is Irene. She uses sex to get what she wants, and John Watson happily has a string of girlfriends. (in Rosenberg 2012: web)

These words complicate the interpretation of Adler's sexuality even more, contradicting what we are shown as an audience. While it has been made clear that Adler can use her sexual assets and skills to get useful information and favours, there is no textual

indication that sex is only that to her. Moffat's words about Irene Adler's sexual preferences bring problematic issues on the variety of sexual orientations that exist in the real world: according to his words above, Irene Adler is "indifferent to sex". Yet it does not seem fit to label her as asexual, considering her characterisation and her definition as "gay". It is also important to look at the wording of the previous quotation to notice the writer's lack of understanding about what sexual orientation means, as he declares that Adler is "mostly gay" with "relationships with men as well". While sexuality cannot be understood as a static element and the limits between the different kinds of identity according to sexual preference can sometimes be ambiguous, Moffat's statement would categorise Adler as bisexual, particularly within the definition that identifies as bisexual the individual who has "the potential to be attracted, romantically and/or sexually, to people of more than one sex, not necessarily at the same time, not necessarily in the same way, and not necessarily to the same degree." (Ochs, in Eisner 2007: 21).

This ambiguity surrounding Adler and her sexual and romantic preferences finds its conclusion when Sherlock finds out her true feelings towards himself. After an episode of continuous insistence on the hyper-sexual nature of Irene Adler, and after admitting that she is a lesbian, it is revealed that after all she has fallen in love with Sherlock Holmes, as her phone password and her physical reactions to him reveal. This conclusion to Adler's story (reinforced at the very end of the episode, when she uses her last moments before her execution to flirtatiously text Sherlock) falls within the trope affirming that lesbian and bisexual women can be 'cured' if they find the right man. The ambiguity that surrounds Adler might make it difficult at first to properly identify her story arc within this trope. The confusion with sexual identities and labels, one could argue caused by a lack of interest and research to show them as a truthful representation,

points in the direction that Adler is no more than a heterosexual male fantasy, as related to sex as to male dominance. However, we can observe a gradual transformation of Adler's character as her relationship with Sherlock progresses.

At the beginning of the episode, when she is mostly identified and shown as lesbian/bisexual, she is mainly a sexual being. She stands above other women in Sherlock's eyes for her wit and for her openness about her own body and desires. As the episode unfolds and she is seen having potential feelings for Sherlock, her physical characterisation makes her more humanised and relatable, as we can see reflected in matters like her more ordinary clothes and lack of make-up, and her abandoning the hypersexual appearance of a dominatrix. As we know, her feelings become her downfall and bring her character to the level of other people connected with Sherlock; that is, below his own intelligence and perceptiveness. The final steps of her transformation, when she is rescued by Sherlock, seal the end of her transformation from an idealised, sexy, unattainable lesbian to damsel in distress, a heteromantic typical woman. Thus, *Sherlock's* Irene Adler, meant to be a 21<sup>st</sup> century modern woman, becomes as trapped as a Victorian female character. Lesli Favor argues that in the context of Sherlock Holmes' stories and as part of Victorian moral systems, "the females' fate are containment, and the English male heroes reassert the power of reason, patriarchy, and Empire" (Favor, 2010: 402). The original Irene Adler seems to escape this fate, but not so her adaptations. As Antonija Primorac points out, *Sherlock's* Adler is part of a trend in which "the spectacle of the nude or scantily clad female body draws viewers' attention away from diminished rather than enhanced female agency in these contemporary renditions of female characters" (2013: 93). As she points out, the naked female body does not become a symbol for liberation and Adler's scene wearing

nothing but her high heels does not provide anything beyond a flashy caricature of the freedom that our supposedly post-feminist society allows.

The trend of erasing the bisexual identity is by no means limited to screen representations of fictional characters. Even in the case of well-known real life celebrities such as Megan Fox, Angelina Jolie or Drew Barrymore, bisexuality is substituted by heterosexuality or homosexuality depending on the gender of their current partners, an instance that might appear anecdotic but that shows the pervasiveness of narratives that erase bisexuality. Bisexuality thus becomes a marginalised identity and it is often understood that bisexual people will find someone who will “ ‘fix’ ” them. This general assumption cannot be forgotten in relation to statistics that point out that bisexual women have “significantly higher lifetime prevalence of rape and sexual violence other than rape by any perpetrator when compared to both lesbian and heterosexual women” (Walters 2013: 1). With findings such as this one, representations of bisexual women on screen become both a dramatised example of the treatment of bisexual women in real life and the site to generate opinions and assumptions about bisexual women. As Scodary and Mulvaney argue, “separating representation from ‘reality’ is futile since the former serves to filter and form people’s sense of the latter” (2005: website). These words reflect how Adler’s transformation from outspokenly interested in women to damsel in distress awaiting the male hero to save her contributes to forming the audience’s understanding of bisexuality/homosexuality and adds to the collective imagination in which heterosexuality and heteronormativity dictate what are the characteristics of LGBTQIAP+<sup>6</sup> collectives.

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<sup>6</sup> LGBTQIAP+ stands for “Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex Asexual Pansexual”, using “+” as an acknowledgment that there are other identities and orientations not included in the acronym. While it is commonly accepted to use the shorter acronym LGBT, there are many variations with more or less acceptance within its communities. As stated in a previous note at the beginning of this chapter, my

*Sherlock*'s Irene Adler becomes not only a failed *femme fatale* and a villainess but also a harmful trope for an already endangered demographic. The episode's uncritical transformation process of Adler from a bisexual (or at least clearly interested in women), politically and intellectually powerful woman to a heterosexual woman in love who becomes literally dependent on her love interest to live is just another take on the myth that bisexual women can be cured if they find the right man. This trope, united to the many around heterosexual men's supposed right to the women they like (regardless of the woman's interest or preferences), contributes to the sense of entitlement towards women that many men have been fed through different forms of media (advertisements, film, literature, television...). Considering realities like the high risk of bisexual women to be sexually assaulted or the troubling cases of young men murdering because they cannot get the attention of women they feel they deserve<sup>7</sup>, the need for a more responsible media representation of women and people with different gender and sexual identities becomes more important than ever. And this is one of the aspects in which *Sherlock* needs to be held up under scrutiny for its own problematic aspects despite the general acclaim of the show, especially as Irene Adler's bisexuality is not the only instance of problematic gender and sexual orientation representation in the show.

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choice has been motivated by the inclusiveness of the term and its purposeful length, which draws attention to the complexity and variety that is intrinsic to LGBTQIAP+ communities.

<sup>7</sup> At the moment of writing, May 2014, two particular cases of violence by men who believed women owed them sexual/romantic attention have put to the front the problem of men's entitlement towards women. The UCSB shooting of six people by a young man who had written a manifesto declaring his hatred of women for not giving him sex and the murder in Connecticut of a young girl, Maren Sanchez, for refusing a boy's invitation to prom even when he knew she was going with her boyfriend.

### 1.3 Confirmed bachelor John Watson: The limits of homoeroticism in *Sherlock*<sup>8</sup>

For a long time, audiences have made a homoerotic reading of Sherlock Holmes and John Watson's relationship. Guy Ritchie's movies (*Sherlock Holmes*, 2009 and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*, 2011) set the perfect precedent for a more explicit reference to this suggested homoeroticism in the following adaptations. Ritchie's Holmes and Watson (Robert Downey Jr. and Jude Law respectively) offer their own take on the famous friendship and Ritchie makes it the central structuring element of the films, which can be classified as "buddy movies" or a "bromance" (Thomas 37: 2012). There is an obvious chemistry between the two actors and they show a high regard and at times affection as characters for each other. However, Watson is shown as faithfully married to Mary since the beginning of the first movie so that any homoerotic subtext needs to be negotiated by the audience, as their relationship is framed first and foremost as that of a friendship. *Sherlock* departs from this textual silence on the possibility that Holmes and Watson could be homosexual from the very first episode. In the pilot, "A Study in Pink" (2010), Holmes and Watson have a conversation in which their sexuality is discussed and in which the suggestion that both of them are homosexual is open for a few moments, only to be immediately rejected, especially by Watson. The possibility that the two main characters, two of the most iconic literary characters in popular culture, might be homosexual appears time and again through the series, but only to be presented as a joke or with at the very least a tint of humour. Critics such as Poore (2012) or Lavigne (2012) consider this playful representation a positive advancement towards representation of homosexuality.

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<sup>8</sup> In the episode "The Reichenbach Fall", when Holmes and Watson appear on the newspapers due to their investigation, Watson is referred to as "confirmed bachelor John Watson". A dialogue ensues in which the implications of this attribute, that he is not married to any woman and therefore potentially in a relationship with Holmes are discussed between the lines with Watson's very clear dislike of such a possibility.

However, I want to argue that this recurrent motif in the series does not have any positive implication in relation to visibility and representation of LGBTQIAP+ people.

It is clear by the reiterated references to Holmes and Watson as a couple that the show writers are aware of the acceptance and prevalence of the homoerotic reading popular among many members of their audience, particularly from the second season onwards. However, not once is the possibility presented as a serious, probable instance. Homosexuality becomes a joke; it is implicitly understood that Holmes and Watson will never become a couple, as that would alienate the homophobic sectors of the audience, but the issue is never completely eschewed in order to attract LGBTQIAP+ audiences and those inclined towards “ ‘slash’ ” or homosexual pairings regardless of their own sexual orientation. This phenomenon, obviously not restricted to *Sherlock*, has received the name of “ ‘queerbaiting’ ”, particularly in the blogging spheres of the internet (Bailey 2014: website).

Some may argue that some representation is better than none at all, or that having Sherlock Holmes and John Watson be gay explicitly is too risky in relation to the possible homophobic backlash. While representation is necessary for minorities and groups who are discriminated against, not all forms of representation bring positive aspects with it. A show does not have to be focused on the LGBTQIAP+ community to have a realistic, positive representation of non-heterosexual identities. In TV shows such as *Grey's Anatomy* (2005–), *Orphan Black* (2013–) or *Orange is the New Black* (2013–) there are examples of lesbian and bisexual women having romantic relationships treated with respect and with the same importance as heterosexual story lines. In *Sherlock*, we have seen that the only bisexual woman is framed as heterosexual (and heteronormative) in the length of one episode. The only instance of an actual gay couple is seen in “The Hounds of Baskerville” (2012), in which two gay innkeepers

suggest that Sherlock and Watson are a couple as well, causing once more Watson to vehemently confirm his heterosexuality. Yet again, homosexuality is used as a joke and is not granted any seriousness and respect as a sexual orientation. In the hands of writers/producers Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, homosexuality is not a normal part of people's identity; it becomes the bait for audiences starved for representation only to be disregarded as soon as it is mentioned to keep traditional audiences comfortable.

As regards the possible backlash or even censorship that having Sherlock Holmes and John Watson be gay could have brought, it is undeniable that such reactions *might* have happened, and probably *would* have happened. In the animated film *The Road to El Dorado* (2000), to name a relatively known case, the original idea of having the two protagonists be a gay couple was changed in favour of a mere friendship. However, many elements were still left in the film to suggest the original intention. This was never the case in *Sherlock*. There has never been any mention or reference to any such external constraints regarding the nature of Holmes and Watson's relationship. The idea of their being gay was simply never seriously considered, as Moffat himself clarifies that "John isn't wired that way, whatever Sherlock is" (in Rosenberg 2012: website). These words make evident that audiences looking for an empathetic, respectful portrayal of a homosexual relationship between the two characters will need to wait for another adaptation, or an altogether different story.

At the beginning of this chapter I have drawn attention to the importance of an adapter's own ideological positioning towards the original source text and how it affects the outcome of the adaptation regardless of their own intentionality. In the two main aspects analysed in this section, Irene Adler's gender and sexual representation and the nature of Sherlock and Watson's relationship, the information directly available from Steven Moffat corresponds with the textual evidence in the show: despite a first

impression of being progressive, the ideology behind *Sherlock* seems right out of the original Victorian times of Doyle's stories. Women's retribution for straying off patriarchal roles assigned to them is being forced back into them after reinforcing men's rational superiority. Homosexuality, while not explicitly condemned, is not a real, legitimate possibility for the story's heroes.

I'll turn next to *Elementary* with a view to proving that this TV show is a far more progressive version of Doyle's stories for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Chapter 2: *Elementary*: Twisting Sherlockian Tropes

### 2.1 Adaptation(s) and originality: The American Sherlock Holmes

*Sherlock*'s success not only in Britain but also overseas called American CBS's attention. While Sherlock Holmes and his stories have been used as the source text of many adaptations, CBS inquired BBC over *Sherlock*'s rights in order to remake the series for American audiences, following the example of *Queer as Folk* (2000-2005) or *Shameless* (2011-). After *Sherlock*'s producers rejected the offer, CBS decided to create their own adaptation of the stories of Sherlock Holmes. It is undeniable then that the two latest Sherlock Holmes adaptations are connected beyond their source text. However, when *Elementary* was announced in 2012, suspicion regarding its originality and distinctive nature from *Sherlock* appeared, most notably inspired by *Sherlock*'s producer Sue Vertue, who declared in *The Independent* in relation to the new adaptation that "It's interesting, as they approached us a while back about remaking our show. At the time, they made great assurances about their integrity, so we have to assume that their modernised Sherlock Holmes doesn't resemble ours in any way, as that would be extremely worrying." (in Sherwin 2012, website). Her comments and doubts about *Elementary* spread to many fans even before the *Elementary* pilot was aired, and academics such as Lynette Porter wrote that "CBS apparently decided it wanted to *clone* Sherlock Holmes for U.S. audiences." (2012: 115 [emphasis added]). The assumption that *Elementary* would be nothing but a poor copy of *Sherlock* persisted until the show started airing and it became apparent that there were no grounds for plagiarizing claims. It is, nevertheless, important to briefly discuss the position of both academics and fans in relation to originality and the nature of adaptation.

First of all, as Cartmell et al. point out, “adaptations are assumed too often to be based on a single ‘sourcetext’, ignoring shifting social and cultural concerns, other films, genre considerations or even financial and production considerations.” (Cartmell et al. 2008: 2). That is, an adaptation never stands on its own as a text that reproduces a source text. In the case of a source text with many adaptations this cultural connectivity is even more important, as a new adaptation of Sherlock Holmes will always be compared both to its predecessors and the original text. However, it seems that because of its massive success *Sherlock* has occupied the cultural space usually reserved to the source text, almost replacing it. Because of its large popularity and fanbase, *Sherlock* has become not merely an adaptation but also a canonical work on its own as a TV series. While we have already considered some of the most problematic aspects of *Sherlock* in Chapter 1, this new ‘canonicity’ transforms the interpretation and recreation of one set of adapters (*Sherlock*’s) into a more rigid and consolidated part of the universe of Sherlock Holmes, at least in the eyes of younger fans unfamiliar with the originals texts.

We need to consider as well the ‘Americanisation’ affecting *Elementary*. While Sherlock Holmes is still British in the show, the setting of the story in New York City led to some anxiety “about the transatlantic transformation of Sherlock Holmes” (Porter 2012: 115). The common belief that American media is more commercial, and therefore, less “ ‘intellectual’ ” or profound than a product created by the BBC did no doubt add to the fears that *Elementary* would not be able to recreate the essence of Doyle’s stories. The format chosen for *Elementary* is also different from *Sherlock* and more typical of American television: whereas *Sherlock* has three ninety minute episodes per season, *Elementary*’s episodes are approximately forty-five minutes long, and each season includes twenty-four episodes. The difference in format clearly affects the kind

of product: *Sherlock* has a more marked film aesthetic and plot-lines and *Elementary* clearly fits in the category of typical television serialisation. Precisely, the nature of CBS' adaptation, not necessarily geared only for the Sherlock Holmes fans or for an highbrow audience, resonates with questions "about the difference between television popular drama and literary fiction" (Caughie 2012: 62) and whether this format is closer to the original stories published by Conan Doyle, which enjoyed a great popularity not unlike television drama nowadays. Additionally, as Cardwell argues "television adaptations are able not only to retain more of the source's narrative, but also to open out the details (...) to build characters and our relationships with them more incrementally and carefully, and to sustain a sense of contemplation" (2007: 187). That is, the serialised nature of *Elementary* allows the adapters to create a world more like the serialised fiction of the Sherlock Holmes stories and a more complex relation between the characters and at the same time the audience.

This exploration of the characters' relationships is one of the central elements of the show and one of the aspects that is most likely to divide critics in regards to the classic debate in adaptation studies: fidelity. Undoubtedly the discourse regarding fidelity has changed in the last decades and as Cardwell explains, "fidelity has been reconfigured and adapters have become more concerned with conveying the " 'spirit' " of the source text" (2007: 193). In other words, the main concern of an adaptation is not to reproduce in a different media the original text but to recreate the themes and important elements in the new text. In the case of Sherlock Holmes, one could argue that television shows such as *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000–) and *House M.D.* (2004-2012), loosely based on Doyle's detective stories, paved the way for a modern day adaptations of Sherlock Holmes. Guy Ritchie's films (*Sherlock Holmes* and

*Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*) also contributed to the notion that what is important in an adaptation is maintaining the *spirit* of the original.

The question, therefore, is what is the essence of Sherlock Holmes, if there is any? Considering the popularity the stories have enjoyed since their publication and the periodical boom in adaptations, it is reasonable to believe that there is at the very least one thread that must be common in any new re-telling of the story for it to be true to the original. One may argue that the common element is the mysteries and Holmes' deductions in order to solve them. It is undeniable that part of the charm of Sherlock Holmes is his more perceptive intellect and the way in which he is able to connect the physical observations he makes to his cases in ways which no one else seems to be able to do. And if one considers the mysteries the true essence of Sherlock Holmes, then *Elementary* may fall short in comparison to *Sherlock*. The British production is much more centred on a particular case in each episode, and solving the enigma occupies much of the screen time, making the adaptation plot driven. By contrast, *Elementary* is a much more character-driven television show. While the basic spine of every episode is a case to investigate, these cases often are a vehicle that allows the characters to grow, relate to each other and to their closest community. This is the case most frequently between Holmes and Watson. One could say that *Elementary* is primarily driven by these characters' interactions and constant struggle, and that is, I would argue, the essence of any Sherlock Holmes story. While solving mysteries is an essential part of both the source text and its adaptations, what really holds it together and has the audience coming for more is the relationship of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. The eccentric and brilliant Holmes, who tends to disregard society's rules of conduct and expectations, finds his perfect match in Watson, intelligent and curious but definitely trying to be a part of that society.

As we will see in this chapter, *Elementary* seeks to show the growing and changing relationship between Sherlock Holmes and Joan Watson. As Porter notes, “some television critics commented that CBS is not being innovative in its Sherlock Holmes adaptation but is merely turning the characters into typical CBS police procedural characters who would inevitably, after a suitable amount of sexual tension, become a romantic couple.” (2012: 127) Casting Lucy Liu, an Asian-American woman of Chinese descent, for the famous role of Dr. Watson did indeed raise both critics and fans’ suspicions of CBS simply trying to eliminate the homoerotic subtext of their relationship in the original stories and the preceding adaptations to make them a heterosexual couple. However, as we will see, these suspicions resulted to be completely unfounded and Sherlock Holmes and Joan Watson, detective partners, have proved to be as true to their essence as they are firmly grounded in modern times.

In the following sections I will focus on the episodes “The Woman” and “Heroine”, which are loosely based on “A Scandal in Bohemia” and feature Irene Adler. First I will deal with Adler and the audiences’ expectations that her character undoes. Second, I will analyse Holmes and Watson’s relationship, and the culmination of its evolution during the first season.

## **2.2. The Woman: The rise and fall from power**

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Irene Adler has become romantically linked to Sherlock Holmes in different adaptations. *Elementary* is not an exception and we learn during the season that what triggered Holmes’ drug addiction was Adler’s murder at the hands of a criminal whom Sherlock was chasing back in London, simply called M. When M, whom the audience supposes to be Moriarty, makes an appearance

in New York City, Holmes discovers that he is in fact a hit man and that actually Adler was murdered following orders from the mysterious Moriarty. Eventually, though, Holmes and Watson find Irene Adler alive and alone in a big house, clearly shaken and traumatised by the experience of being kidnapped. This is the starting point of the episode “The Woman” and the ensuing investigation to find Moriarty.

Considering the initial part of this episode we might argue that *Elementary*’s Adler fares even worse than the one in *Sherlock*. After all she has been kidnapped and kept imprisoned by a Mr Stapleton in order to punish Sherlock for aiding Scotland Yard in investigations connected to Moriarty’s crimes and she is released only by Moriarty’s command. Adler initially seems to have appeared only to dramatise Sherlock’s development in the season, which we will discuss later on in this chapter, and also to show the audience the extent of his feelings for her and the impact she had on his life, as we see flashbacks of their relationship back in London during the episode. However, the audience’s assumptions are turned upside down when Irene Adler is revealed to have been Moriarty all along faking her own death to try to stop Sherlock from discovering her criminal plans.

The implications of this strange revelation are manifold, some more subtle than others. In the complexities of her character and her interactions with Holmes and Watson we find a shift of gender assumptions and preconceptions that sets *Elementary* apart from *Sherlock*. However, this Adler/Moriarty is in no way disconnected from other Sherlock Holmes adaptations. I will argue that *Elementary* uses the different tropes and assumptions that the audience will most likely attach to Irene Adler because of previous adaptations and twists them as we will now see.

One of the first elements to discuss is the change of Irene Adler’s subordination to Moriarty. In other adaptations, including *Sherlock* and *Sherlock Holmes*, while she

might first appear to be in control of her actions and schemes, Adler is ultimately tied in her actions to Moriarty. In *Sherlock*, Moriarty actually uses the information Adler compiles in order to blackmail the British government. In *Elementary*, before she is revealed as Moriarty, Sherlock suggests that she has been working for Moriarty and the audience is left with the suspense of whether that is the case or she has truly been kidnapped. These two possibilities, each limiting Irene to a different role of subordination, are ultimately abandoned for a third, unexpected outcome: Irene is only a character played by Jaime Moriarty and she has known no subordination, either as an accomplice or a victim. Beyond the shock value of this discovery, there is a substantial change in the power dynamics that the episode had introduced, and having Moriarty be a woman puts forward a new reading of the Sherlock Holmes universe. Cranny-Francis et al. argue that “another way in which readers have been identified as making resistant readings is their production of texts which are based on genres, or even specific texts, with well-established cultural meanings, but which change or subvert those meanings” (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003: 122). In their role of adapters, and therefore both readers and writers, Robert Doherty and Craig Sweeny, co-writers and co-executive producers, have thus subverted the cultural meanings attached to the characters of Irene Adler and Moriarty. Sherlock’s perspective, and the audience’s, needs to readjust to this new paradigm. When she reveals herself to him as Moriarty after he has been shot by one of her former criminal allies, she makes sure that Sherlock understands that he has been asking the wrong questions about her all along: she first discredits the assumption that a woman cannot be a criminal mastermind telling him that “Other times [a man pretended to be Moriarty on her behalf] because I suspected a potential client might struggle with my gender. As if men had a monopoly on murder” (“The Woman” 2013). She does not ignore the world’s stereotypes about women, but as she did with Sherlock she uses them

to her own benefit while carrying on with her criminal activities. She is also shown as assured in her own abilities and talents and when Sherlock suggests “So you’re saying we are the same?” she replies “I’m saying I’m better” (“The Woman” 2013). While the show obviously does not in any way condone her criminal activities, it challenges the idea that Sherlock Holmes is a special individual that has unique abilities, and places Moriarty as more talented and skilful than he is, even though she uses her abilities to illegal ends.

Another important element in Irene Adler’s characterisation that needs to be addressed is her relationship with Sherlock. While they were romantically involved and it is later shown that while Moriarty was playing Sherlock there was at least some part of truth in her affections, the show very clearly establishes the unhealthy nature of their relationship from the beginning of the episode. To do so, they do not need any dialogue; during the season the audience sees a Sherlock Holmes that barely displays emotions or affection towards others through touch. While Jonny Lee Miller’s performance of the detective is indeed very physical and the audience can easily pick on his typical shifts and movements, he seldom touches anyone. He barely ever shares a scene with Watson in which they touch (and when that happens, even the lightest friendly touch is presented as an important moment) and it is clearly established that Holmes is not a person who particularly enjoys affectionate physical contact. At the beginning of “The Woman”, however, Holmes’ reaction to seeing Adler is almost aggressive in his embrace and the way he holds her face. While one might be ready to overlook this, considering that Adler was supposedly dead, its importance continues as this physicality is shown again, ever more forcefully, later on in the episode. This non-verbal communication gives the audience a necessary clue to avoid romanticising Sherlock and Adler’s relationship, and the show continues to frustrate any possibilities of that

romanticising through “The Woman” and “Heroine”. In the scene we have already commented on, when Moriarty saves Sherlock from being killed by one of her former men, there is a hint that love is moving her to save him and that it is also the reason why she came back to his life. However, such theories are quickly dismissed in their conversation:

**Sherlock:** Why resurface in New York?

**Moriarty:** I'd heard of your miraculous recovery, and I was curious to see how far you'd come.

**Sherlock:** That's bollocks. Returning to me is a risk, and you'd only take it if I was close to undermining another of your plots. That is why you wanted me to leave the country with you earlier, was it not?

**Moriarty:** Same old Sherlock. You look at people and you see puzzles. I see games. You? You're a game I'll win every time. (“The Woman” 2013)

This exchange reminds the audience that while Moriarty and Holmes share many abilities and skills, their moral code is different and that their relationship was essentially faulted to begin with. Again, while *Elementary* plays with the tropes surrounding Irene Adler, it is made evident that these tropes are there to be dismantled.

The last part of Irene Adler/Moriarty that we will focus on is her defeat. As we saw early in the first chapter, in the original story by Arthur Conan Doyle, Adler is not defeated. In fact, she is the one to beat Holmes in his deductions and plans and in doing so she acquires the category of *The Woman*. *Elementary* does not follow the original story's path and at the end of “Heroine” (a title which seems to point out to Sherlock's drug abuse, but that also will reflect on Watson's ‘heroic’ role in the episode), Moriarty is defeated and her plans thwarted. Yet again, the difference with adaptations like *Sherlock* is more than apparent. Even in her demise there is a significant change in the gender power dynamics from what one might expect in a Sherlock Holmes story. In “A Scandal in Belgravia” we saw that what really cause Sherlock to defeat her are her sentimentality and her feelings for him. In “Heroine” the real cause of Moriarty's defeat

is her undervaluing of Joan Watson. As both women get to talk after Moriarty creates a ruse to be alone with Watson, Moriarty tells her she's trying to find out why Sherlock seems to find her so interesting, declaring that "Far as I can determine, you're a sort of mascot" ("Heroine" 2013) and implying that the nature of their relationship is sexual. Criminal activities aside, Moriarty's contemptuous analysis of Joan Watson, a surgeon who would give up her job after losing a patient and being temporarily removed from medicine and decide to help others as a sober companion, and how she might play a part in her own plans make her character similar to Holmes in *Sherlock* in his assessment of most people as inferior. Moriarty is a brilliant individual who has the abilities to decipher people and group dynamics, however her lack of true understanding of emotions and intelligence other than her own cause her to belittle Watson's potential threat to her plans. The difference between this female Moriarty and BBC's *Sherlock* is the perspective taken by the shows towards this way of treating people. Polasek argues in her article about *Sherlock* that in this adaptation Holmes "is carelessly cruel to those who care for him as well as with his sparring partners. Members of the official police force that use his services as a consulting detective call him 'the freak' and *openly dislike and denigrate him.*" (Polasek 2013: 389 [emphasis added]). While this description is accurate, even Polasek's choice of words indicates that the audience is clearly swayed towards sympathising with Sherlock and at least partially consider his cruelty and lack of empathy something funny; any attack on his person in the series is considered denigration, despite having sufficient indications that he has very likely been the one to push other people's boundaries with his attitude.

*Elementary*'s Moriarty is not afforded this leniency. Her character and her scorn of Watson's abilities bring about her arrest. As we will next see, it is Watson's

emotional intelligence and cunning that allow the NYPD to arrest her, and not a grand plan or deduction that Sherlock Holmes could have made.

### **2.3. My Dear Watson: Audience identification and social responsibility**

While Moriarty's identity and gender came as a surprise at the end of Season One, *Elementary* had become known even before airing for the decision of making Dr Watson a woman. As we saw earlier, this change brought on abundant criticism and scepticism towards the show and the lurking suspicion that there would be a heteronormative romance between Holmes and Watson. However, this change added no romanticism to the show. As Robert Doherty pointed out "telling a Holmes and Watson story is not a story of a romance. It's a story of a partnership" (in "My Dear Watson" 2013). Then, why change Watson's gender? Again, Doherty explains his decision:

"I had read a handful of psychological assessments of the character, Sherlock Holmes. One of them mentioned he had something of an aversion to women. I jotted down, "Let's make Watson a woman" in my pad. But I kept coming back to it. I was curious to see what would happen, you know, what would change, what should change. Ultimately, as I continued to develop the pitch, I felt really nothing should change". (in "My Dear Watson" 2013)

We see here that the initial reason for having Watson be a woman was curiosity towards the effects on the characters' friendship dynamics. And while Doherty says that "nothing should change" in Holmes and Watson's partnership, it is precisely the fact that they remain equally important as characters that creates a change in the context of Sherlock Holmes' adaptations. We will discuss three main aspects of Joan Watson's characterisation in the show: her lack of sexualisation, her identification with the audience and her friendship with Sherlock.

Rosalind Gill discusses the increase of women's sexualisation in the media and points out that "the resexualization and the commodification of women's bodies in the wake of feminist critiques that for a decade or more had neutralized at least the more overt examples of objectification, and to the exclusions of this practice—only some (young, fit, beautiful) bodies are sexualized" (Gill 2007: 38). This trend in many, if not all media formats seems to make it inevitable that a female character, particularly if she fits the parameters of conventional beauty, will be sooner or later sexualised or objectified for the benefit of her fellow male characters and the audience. However, Joan Watson is never presented as eye candy or sexualised in any manner. While through the season some characters suggest that she will necessarily have an affair with Sherlock, in her condition as a hired woman living under a rich man's roof, the idea is always immediately dismissed, more often by Watson than not. While it is difficult to point out the lack of sexualisation of a character when there are no instances of it, some recurring elements in the season help understand better how this lack works.

In many occasions in the show, the audience witnesses Sherlock waking Watson up with news of the investigation they are conducting. This scenario offers endless possibilities to sexualise Watson: she could be dressed with sensual underwear, be asleep in positions considered sexual or she could be stared at with sexual intent by Sherlock Holmes, for example. Yet, she is frequently shown as simply annoyed about suddenly waking up, wearing practical pyjamas or sleeping covered by her blankets. This lack of sexualisation is made even more apparent in the episode "Snow Angels", in which Holmes wakes up Watson and hands her some clothes to get changed, which she does on camera while he explains some details of a case. During the scene Sherlock not once turns to peep at her while she is getting dressed and the audience is encouraged to pay attention to the element more prominent and focused, Sherlock himself.

Additionally, instead of having her change in plain view behind Sherlock, she simply changes most of her clothes under the blankets, in a natural but non-objectified way. While this is only an instance, it illustrates how the show consistently refuses to objectify Watson under circumstances in which the audience is accustomed to see sexualised women. For this reason, Moriarty's insinuations that Watson has a sexual relationship with Sherlock are more striking and potentially appalling to the audience. Moriarty's words also suggest a racial component that is not observed in the show in general, and while race is not the focus of this dissertation, it is worth noting that the respect and lack of objectification that Watson is afforded in the show is doubly important, as a woman, and a Chinese-American woman. The show avoids not only sexualising her as a woman but also fetishizing her as an Asian woman, giving Moriarty's remarks a racist undertone.

Watson's lack of sexualisation is closely connected to one of the most important aspects of the show: the audience is primarily encouraged to identify with Watson. Craig Sweeny, co-producer and co-writer, stated that they "try to filter as much of the show as we can through Watson's perspective. Because, while extraordinary in many ways, she's much more the audience surrogate. She is us." (in "My Dear Watson" 2013). This process of identification within the Sherlock Holmes tradition is nothing new: the original stories are always narrated by Watson, a link between the reader and the genial Sherlock Holmes. However, in the context of the adaptations, the clear positioning of the audience to align themselves with Watson's perspective is charged with even more meaning. First of all, gender power dynamics are reversed again with this decision. Not only is Watson a woman, but she also becomes the centre and point of reference to the audience in the confusing process of getting to know Sherlock Holmes. Pascale Krumm argues that in the original stories "Holmes' inability to understand

woman is due to the element of difference, the otherness, which ties in with the outsider theme noted earlier. Time and time again he will ponder the enigma of the female gender” (1996: 197). While that rings true not only in the original texts but also in adaptations such as *Sherlock*, *Elementary* clearly tries to differentiate itself by making Watson the audience’s surrogate. Within the show, women cease to be so firmly caged in their difference and otherness when the central perspective of the show is given to a female character such as Joan Watson. It is not merely the fact that a female character is the centre of the show, which does not make a show necessarily progressive *per se*, but the kind of female character that she has been created to be.

For instance, Watson’s choice of clothing reveals a feminine and yet practical style, and her progress into the “ ‘masculine’ ” world of the detective is never visually represented by making her attire or her body language more aggressive or typically masculine. Her emotional intelligence and alternative way of resolving problems is not regarded as inferior to Sherlock’s methods. In fact, in “Heroine” her insight and observations on Moriarty’s character prove to be decisive, as she is the one to convince Sherlock of pretending he has relapsed in his drug abuse and suffered an overdose which needs hospitalisation. As Watson predicts, Moriarty’s own sense of superiority and her underestimation of Watson’s abilities lure her into Sherlock’s room at the hospital, which allows the NYPD to catch her. Additionally, in many instances during the show, Watson actively acts upon and calls people out on behaviours that consciously or not mark women as other and different. For example, when Sherlock tries to link her bad mood to her menstruation, she sarcastically replies “Couching it as scientific observation totally negates the misogyny” (“A Giant Gun, Filled with Drugs” 2013) or she demands to given the same information about a case as the rest of team, refusing to accept that not sharing that information is done for her safety. Watson’s

character thus refuses to be complicit with misogynistic narratives, even when they come from Sherlock, and through her identification with the audience, they are in turn prompted as well to disengage themselves from sexist practices or comments.

All these examples of identification form a bigger picture in which the audience empathises with Watson herself, as opposed to the women in *Sherlock*. In their essay “Inf(lecting *Pride and Prejudice*: Dialogism, Intertextuality and Adaptation”, Mireia Aragay and Gemma López describe the process of identification that the audience experiences with Elizabeth Bennet: “By means of identification with Elizabeth, through participation in her Imaginary power to make good the lack in man, the female spectator can indirectly be possessed by Darcy, thus making good her own lack.” (2005: 209). In other words, Aragay and López argue that the identification with the female protagonist of the story is only a mechanism to make the (expectedly) female audience feel as wanted and possessed as Elizabeth is. Considering Irene Adler’s character in *Sherlock* one can perceive that a similar process takes place; the male audience is most likely to identify with Sherlock for his intelligence, abilities and success with women like Adler. As Laura Mulvey once noted about the films *Only Angels Have Wings* and in *To Have and Have Not*, “[b]y means of identification with him, through participation in his power, the spectator can indirectly possess her too” (1975, 14); these words, penned in 1975, still apply to many media texts and describes perfectly the audience’s implication with Holmes and Adler’s relationship. Meanwhile, the female audience finds identification not in Adler’s character *per se*, but to use Aragay and López’s words, “through participation in her Imaginary power to make good in the lack in man”. *Elementary*’s Watson does not have a story arc completely dependent on Sherlock. Both have their own individual drives and motivations, even if they are obviously interconnected in the show’s timeline. This means that while Watson’s influence is

essential in Sherlock's development through the season, she does not exist as a mere tool to further his character.

Janice Winship once asked, in relation to the advertising world, "who does this advert think I am?" (Winship 1981, in Gill 2007: 50). This simple question can and should be extrapolated to all forms of media and is particularly useful to find out the reasons of the difference in identification that we have seen. Who does *Sherlock* think I am? Or differently put, who is *Sherlock* ideally written for? Much could be said to answer this question, but within the scope of this work we only need look at the characters we are encouraged to identify with, Sherlock Holmes and John Watson, and the traits they display: white, educated, middle class or apparently assimilated into it, attractive to women, but unwilling or unable to form any stable relationships with them, heterosexual despite the joking suggestions, above the rules applicable to common people and to different degrees smarter than them. While, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the show cleverly tries to not actively alienate any potential audiences, *Sherlock* is ideally written for white, young, somewhat educated, heteronormative men. This is not uncommon at all, as it is often the default target audience of many different forms of media. In this context, asking *Elementary* the same question offers a more complex answer. If we look at Watson's character, we find an Asian-American woman, educated, middle-class, attractive but not sexualized, non-judgmental, empathetic and caring for other people both personally and in her work capacities, someone who wishes to find a partner she can have an equal and intimate connection with, someone who cares about her role in society and who seeks to help and heal. And while we are primarily encouraged to identify with Watson, her own empathy allows the audience to sympathize with a vast array of characters, prominent like Sherlock himself or minor, such as mentally ill characters, homeless characters, survivors of sexual violence, etc.

The ideal audience of *Elementary* is much broader than the one in *Sherlock*, and consequently the show is less likely to disenfranchise any particular group, even upon close examination of the text.

The last aspects that that will be analysed are Watson's career development and her relationship with Holmes, which are closely connected. At the beginning of the season, Watson is hired by Sherlock's father as a sober companion after he has been released from a rehabilitation centre. One of the requirements of her job is that she must check in on Sherlock at least every three hours, and as she needs to spend so much time with him she always finds herself dragged into crime scenes. Her medical past and her own observational and deductive abilities soon prove to be useful in various cases and by the time her contract as a sober companion is over she has become genuinely interested in the detective work that Sherlock performs. It is at this point that Holmes offers his guidance and instruction as a detective, taking her as his apprentice and assistant. This offer is as important for Watson as it is for Holmes' story arc. She receives the opportunity to fulfil herself professionally in a true vocational career, something that she had lost when she abandoned her job as a surgeon. Holmes receives in turn the professional and emotional help that Watson provides. Robert Doherty stated in a personal interview that "[*Elementary's*] Sherlock is a few years past your standard Sherlock, to whom everything came easily. ...He's discovered he's not a machine in bottoming out—and being surprised that he's capable of bottoming out" (in Polasek 2013: 391). This low point in Holmes' life is the starting point of *Elementary*, and Watson's presence starts his recovery not only as a drug addict, but also as a member of a larger community, one of the recurring themes of the show. Watson, who has all the social and interpersonal knowledge that Sherlock lacks, often acts as a mediator between him and the world at large.

The effect of their relationship is clear when one looks at the first and last episode of the first season. From Holmes' affirmation to Watson that "the simple truth is I don't need you" ("Pilot" 2012) to trusting completely that Watson's plan with the help of the NYPD will work much better than anything he might devise to catch Moriarty by himself. This evolution appears even more pronounced when one compares it to *Sherlock*. Two of the recurring ideas that appear in the three seasons of the show are that Sherlock Holmes is smarter than anyone else in the show and the fact that he is above rules and general accountability for his actions. While *Elementary's* Sherlock might be like that at the beginning of the show, the first season steadily builds on the idea that different people can reach a better solution if they come together than if one isolated individual tries to solve the same problem by themselves<sup>9</sup>.

In terms of gender dynamics, this change becomes even more important. Community and reliance on other people are clearly marked as a strength and a desirable trait, whereas individualistic competitiveness and disregard for other people's help become weaknesses. These worldviews, traditionally coded as feminine and masculine respectively, find in *Elementary* a space in which their importance is reversed from what one might usually expect. Victor Seidler points out that [r]ather than questioning dominant male rationalism, we sustain it by the ways we think of "hegemonic masculinities'. (...) This means that emotions such as sadness, fear and vulnerability cannot be acknowledged within a dominant male culture that still defines emotion as 'feminine'" (2006: 16-17). *Elementary* questions these notions of "traditional masculinity" understood in the modern Western world and bets on an alternative model for men. Instead of adhering to the perpetuation of "the stigma of

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<sup>9</sup> During season two the show explores in more depth how Sherlock needs to be held accountable for his actions and the impact these have on other people, bringing the character one step closer to becoming a member of a larger community.

anything vaguely feminine” as part of a masculine identity and sexuality that requires “that men must not involve in anything remotely feminine (emotional, passive, etc)” (Plummer 2005: 181-182), Sherlock embraces these aspects as part of himself, which allow him to grow and further develop himself. Sherlock Holmes can become a hero without exhibiting any hypermasculinization (like Ritchie’s very physical and even aggressive Holmes) or a general contempt for anything considered feminine (like BBC’s Holmes disrespect of emotions and sentiment). However, this change is not framed as an easy procedure than can be achieved overnight. It is stressed through Sherlock’s recovery as an addict that abandoning the toxic models given to men as ideals is a process. As Sara Martín suggests , la identidad masculina patriarcal es dinámica, es decir, se define por lo que hace, y por ello está constantemente monitorizada por un sistema social que premia lo activo frente lo pasivo, la capacidad de decisión sobre la subordinación, la acción frente la relación” (2011: 53). Sherlock’s actions and rejection of traditionally “masculine” values to define himself also mark this different identity as dynamic. He needs time and support from a community willing to help, but it requires above all personal commitment and his realisation of the negativity attached to his past behaviour (his identity before meeting Watson). But every instance in which he refuses to act in accordance to patriarchal standards (trusting Watson’s ability to produce a plan and becoming a relatively passive agent of this plan) makes becomes a reaffirmation of this insubordinate identity.

Teresa de Lauretis once wrote about women’s representation in cinema that “[t]he effort and challenge now are how to effect another vision: to construct other objects and subjects of vision, and to formulate the conditions of representability of another social subject.” (1994: 148). Twenty years after her words, there is still much that remains to be done about women’s position in all aspects of media. While in no

way perfect as a beacon of representation, *Elementary* proves through characters like Irene Adler/Moriarty and Joan Watson that it is possible to have other perspectives and visions about women as individuals and as social subjects.

## Conclusions

In the present dissertation my main focus has been the analysis of Irene Adler's character and Holmes and Watson's relationship in both *Sherlock* and *Elementary*. My purpose was to compare both shows to find out the differences between their characters in terms of gender representation to prove or refute my claim that *Elementary* is much more inclusive and progressive than *Sherlock*. To do so, apart from comparing the two shows I also used the original short story by Arthur Conan Doyle, "A Scandal in Bohemia", on which the episodes I have analysed are based on.

In Chapter 1 I explained the ways in which the original Irene Adler was inserted in a very liberating and progressive narrative for Victorian times. While most of the short story is informed by the perspective of the king of Bohemia, through her letter to Holmes the reader realises that she has the opportunity to break free from the roles of adventuress or *femme fatale* assigned to her and is finally able to pursue her own happiness, away from either the king or Holmes. This escape from a male narrative is partially granted to *Elementary*'s Irene Adler/Moriarty, but not to her adaptation in *Sherlock*. *Sherlock*'s Adler is presented under cover of progress and liberation as she makes use of her own sexuality and body, but her story arc contains her into a traditional subordination to the male hero, Sherlock Holmes. Additionally, she is first presented as bisexual only to be literally brought down to her knees and have her narrative become heteronormative and conventional. In direct contrast with this rendition of Irene Adler, *Elementary* interpretation of the character has her own narrative of empowerment, as seen in Chapter 2. Irene Adler, while apparently tangled in a love relationship with Holmes and subordinated to Moriarty's power, turns out to be Moriarty herself, a woman in control of her own body and actions, including her

invention of 'Irene Adler'. This villainous Adler/Moriarty is also eventually defeated, but the difference in the reasons of that defeat are radically different from the ones in *Sherlock*; while the latter is caused by Adler's sentiment and affection towards Sherlock Holmes, seen as a weakness, the former is clearly caused by Adler's underestimation of Watson's abilities to beat her, a different kind of weakness. In regard to Irene Adler, therefore, while both adaptations deviate from the character's final outcome in the original, *Elementary* is much more progressive than *Sherlock*.

The second element that I have discussed, Watson and Holmes' relationship, was obviously affected by the fact that *Elementary* decided to have Joan Watson instead of John Watson. This change affected the perspective to adopt in my analysis of each of the adaptations. In Chapter 1 I analysed Holmes and Watson's relationship from the perspective of the homoerotic readings it carries. While *Sherlock* writers are obviously aware of these readings and they partially incorporate them to their text, they do so only as jokes. The possibility that Watson and Holmes are a gay couple frequently appears only to be laughed at or vehemently refuted by Watson. This " 'queerbaiting' " works as a strategy to attract both homophobic and pro-LGBTQIAP+ audiences, but proves insufficient as a respectful and non-stereotyped portrayal of LGBTQIAP+ people.

In Chapter 2 I took a different approach to Watson and Holmes' relationship, as the homoerotic reading it is frequently attached to is not possible in *Elementary*. Watson's gender, however, is not an excuse to cleanly remove this homoeroticism and still keep some sexual tension. Watson and Holmes keep their friendship as such offering a story of an equal relationship between a man and a woman, an unusual feature in popular television and cinema. This equality originates first in the characterisation of Joan Watson. One of the pillars of the show is Watson's identification with the audience; she becomes the audience's surrogate, which

encourages all demographics to sympathise with a non-white woman, an uncommon occurrence in television. This identification is connected with the lack of objectification and sexualisation of Watson. It is obviously much more difficult to regard and view as an object a character who usually lends the audience her perspective to understand the events in the text. Despite the multiple occasions in which sexualisation could have happened, *Elementary* proves consistent in its respectful gaze towards the female body and its equally respectful and non stereotypical writing of female characters, with Watson as its most prominent example. I also analysed at the end of Chapter 2 the way in which Watson's interactions with Holmes mark Holmes' status as a hero within the story in a different way than what is expected from Conan Doyle's detective. Watson's intelligence and abilities are frequently different from those which Holmes exhibits and are what would traditionally be considered 'feminine'. Instead of disregarding them as inferior to Sherlock's skills, her perspective are frequently the necessary element to resolve crime investigations and gradually during the season they help Sherlock to become a valued member of a community instead of being an isolated genius. In connection to my original question, again *Elementary* is more progressive as a text than *Sherlock*.

After considering all these elements of both shows I have confirmed my hypothesis that *Elementary* is a much more progressive and inclusive show than *Sherlock*. I would like to reiterate the use of these terms, inclusive and progressive, as characteristics of a text that is aware of the inequalities in the representation of certain marginalised groups across media (for example women, LGBTQIAP+ people, people of colour, disabled people, etc.) and that actively try to represent them in an equal and non-stereotyped way. However, I want to note that the scope of this work has been focused only on recent Sherlockian adaptations, and not on the detective fiction genre or on

popular television procedurals. Consequently, the conclusions reached in this dissertation might have to be put into perspective when one considers the genre as a whole. In other words, while *Elementary* is a progressive text within recent Sherlock Holmes adaptations, it should be contextualised in the tradition of detective television narratives to gain a better understanding of its characteristics as a text.

I would like to suggest some further research related to my dissertation. One obvious possibility would be to do a similar project incorporating the new episodes aired of each of the shows (*Sherlock* season 3 and *Elementary* season 2). Another possibility would be the analysis of the influence of shows such as *House M.D.* (2004-2012) or *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (2000–) in the revival of Sherlock Holmes adaptations. An analysis of Irene Adler's adaptations through the history of film and television would also prove an interesting project, and one that would likely find interesting aspects of trends in popular culture about women's role in society.

I believe that this dissertation has contributed in its own small scale to the body of research about Sherlock Holmes. Precisely because there is not much academic work about *Elementary*, I hope my dissertation will help future researchers to consider the show as a valuable part of the Sherlock Holmes tradition. I also hope my research will add one more resource for those investigating gender in Sherlock Holmes adaptations and gender in popular television shows.

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