

## Postfeminism and Screen Adaptations of Sherlock Holmes Stories: The Case of Irene Adler

As it reinterprets a well-known narrative, each new adaptation of a classic text reflects on, among other things, the concerns of its own time and place by emphasising certain aspects of the adapted text and downplaying or eliding others. Sherlock Holmes stories serve as a case in point. A number of the Hollywood adaptations starring Basil Rathbone produced during World War II update Arthur Conan Doyle's stories by taking their cue from 'His Last Bow: An Epilogue of Sherlock Holmes' (1917) where Holmes comes out of retirement to help the World War I effort, so that the updated versions reimagine the detective helping the allies fight the Nazis: by recovering secret documents (*Sherlock Holmes in Washington* 1943), foiling fifth columnists' plans to spread fear and panic in Britain via radio broadcasts (*Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror* 1942) or preventing the latest bomb patents from falling into Nazi hands (*Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon* 1942). Obversely, the Soviet adaptations, *Sherlok Kholmes i doktor Vatson* (trans. Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson 1979) and *Priklyucheniya Sherloka Kholmsa i doktora Vatsona* (trans. The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson 1980–1986), made during the Soviet military involvement in Afghanistan, censor all mention of Doctor Watson's experience of the Afghan war so as to avoid any possible discussion of potential parallels.<sup>1</sup> The gradual shift in the approach to the notions of fidelity and period detail in Granada Television's series of Holmes adaptations (1984–1994) can be viewed, in part, as emblematic of its era's contested relationship with the so-called heritage cinema, a subgenre of costume drama

that sparked off a lively debate on the relationship between ideology and media in British cultural and film studies in the mid-1980s and early 1990s (for more on heritage cinema see Chap. 3).

Considered in their social and cultural contexts, the film and TV adaptations of Sherlock Holmes produced between 2008 and 2016 can be seen as sharing one peculiar characteristic: an overt heteronormative sexualisation of the character of Sherlock Holmes and a related transformation of the character of Irene Adler as his main love-interest. The proverbially asexual Victorian detective, ‘the most perfect reasoning and observing machine’ (Doyle 1994, p. 3) for whom any form of emotion would present a distraction from, and interference with, his work is now changed into a highly physical and highly sexed adventure hero (as played by Robert Downey Jr. in Guy Ritchie’s two films from 2009 to 2011), a broken-hearted romantic who becomes a drug addict after the loss of his loved one (Jonny Lee Miller in CBS’s *Elementary*, 2012–present) or a heterosexual sociopath (Benedict Cumberbatch in BBC’s *Sherlock* 2010–2017). The latter series famously played up the possibility of a homosexual relationship between Holmes and Watson in Seasons One and Two, only to crush the fan-driven speculation in Season Three’s episode ‘The Sign of the Three’ (not to mention the inclusion of some rather odious homophobic jokes in the standalone episode of Season Four, ‘The Abominable Bride’). Hand in hand with this peculiar (hetero) sexualisation of Sherlock Holmes, these same adaptations introduce an interconnected metamorphosis of Irene Adler.

The only female character ever to outwit the legendarily astute Sherlock Holmes, Irene Adler appears in ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’, the first of Arthur Conan Doyle’s detective stories published in *The Strand* (1891) and later collected in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1892). Since the story’s first appearance, there have been many afterlives of ‘the woman’ (Doyle 1994, p. 3) in screen adaptations and appropriations of the Holmes canon.<sup>2</sup> Anne Humpherys uses the term ‘aftering’ to ‘describe the “writing over” of Victorian novels’ so notable in late twentieth-century fiction (Humpherys 2007, p. 442), and I am employing it here to denote a commensurate approach to Victorian novels’ twenty-first-century screen adaptations and appropriations. ‘Aftering’ is therefore understood as a term encompassing both adaptations and appropriations of Victorian heritage that show a self-conscious, inter-textual, and often ironic relationship with the adapted texts and the past in general. As such, ‘aftering’ is here read as a key element of the

neo-Victorian phenomenon: a product of the desire to have more, and still more, of the cherished Victorian heritage today, but in a version shaped and produced along the lines of contemporary needs and expectations.

This chapter therefore examines the depiction of Victorian women's agency in contemporary adaptations and appropriations of Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories by analysing the portrayal of Irene Adler who was, by Holmes's own admission, one of only four antagonists to have outsmarted him (Doyle 1994, p. 105).<sup>3</sup> My focus is largely trained on the rendering of Adler in BBC's globally popular TV series *Sherlock* from 2012 ('A Scandal in Belgravia', S02 E01); on the use of the character by the same name in CBS's award-winning television series *Elementary* (2012–present) and in Guy Ritchie's blockbusters *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011). The analysis also touches upon the appropriation of Adler in the neo-Victorian mystery novel *Good Night, Mr Holmes* by Carole Nelson Douglas (1990) and a few other, earlier adaptations and appropriations. Irene Adler's afterlives on screen are analysed in the context of the contemporary postfeminist media's identification of a woman's power and agency with her sexualised body, and how this is made additionally titillating through association with the proverbially prudish and restrained Victorian text. I pay especial attention to the historical parallels the screen texts establish between the 'now' of adaptations' production contexts and 'then' of Doyle's short stories, particularly in those adaptations—such as BBC's *Sherlock*—which update the narratives to a contemporary setting. The prominent reduction in Adler's agency that is hidden behind the spectacle of her overt sexualisation in her screen afterlives is discussed as reflective of the postfeminist sensibility and neo-conservative trends present in mainstream, big budget TV and film adaptations and appropriations of nineteenth-century classics. As I further elaborate in subsequent chapters, these trends are not limited only to updatings: by and large they define the production context of much neo-Victorianism on screen.

## POSTFEMINISM AND CONTEMPORARY ANGLOPHONE MEDIA

Since the late 1980s 'postfeminism' has been ascribed a number of often contradictory meanings. One of the earliest was as a synonym for the backlash against feminism that was evident in the US and UK media

of the late 1980s and early 1990s (see especially Faludi 1992). In her analysis of 1990s media culture, Imelda Whelehan memorably described this reaction against feminism as indicative of ‘an era of “retro-sexism”—nostalgia for a lost, uncomplicated past peopled by “real” women and humorous cheeky chappies, where the battle of the sexes is most fondly remembered as being played out as in a situation comedy’ (Whelehan 2000, p. 11). In the British and American media postfeminism has also been used to refer to a supposed obsolescence of feminism, pitting the stereotype of the older, serious, sour-faced second-wave feminist against the fun-loving, pole-dancing, carefree younger postfeminist who grew up listening to the ‘girl power’ band *Spice Girls*. The appeal of such a post-feminist discourse, present in a wide array of woman-oriented media—from magazines like *Cosmopolitan* and *Daily Mail Online*’s *Femail* section to popular TV shows like *Sex and the City* (1998–2004)—is based on the superficial appropriation of elements of a feminist vocabulary for an individualistic consumerist notion of the self, who now has the right to *choose* traditional gender roles and imagine herself as being strong and empowered when flaunting her sexuality. Furthermore, and in line with other concurrent phenomena in the second half of the twentieth century carrying the prefix post- (postmodernism, postcolonialism, etc.), ‘postfeminism’ has also been used in academic discourse to mean an epistemological turn from the racial, class and sexual blindspots of white, middle-class and largely heterosexual Anglo-American second-wave feminism towards new (arguably more intersectional) feminisms. While the latter view (often identified with the third and fourth wave feminisms) promises a pluralistic approach in an age of identity politics, it still does not explain away its entanglement with anti-feminist elements. The latter is the reason why feminist sociologists and media scholars have reconceptualised postfeminism as a ‘double entanglement’ of anti-feminist and feminist ideas (McRobbie 2004, p. 255). As Angela McRobbie points out, the contemporary postfeminist landscape—social and cultural—is:

marked by a new kind of anti-feminist sentiment which is different from simply being a question of cultural backlash against the seeming gains made by feminist activities. [...] Elements of feminism have been taken into account, and have been absolutely incorporated into political and institutional life. Drawing on a vocabulary that includes words like ‘empowerment’, and ‘choice’, these elements are then converted into a

much more individualistic discourse, and they are deployed in this new guise, particularly in media and popular culture, but also by agencies of the state, as a kind of substitute for feminism. [...] ‘Feminism’ is instrumentalised, it is brought forward and claimed by Western governments, as a signal to the rest of the world that this is a key part of what freedom now means. (McRobbie 2009, p. 1)

It is primarily in this sense—one that has also been deployed by feminist cultural and media critics such as Rosalind Gill, Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker—that I use the term ‘postfeminism’<sup>4</sup>: to signify a form of anti-feminism that has appropriated aspects of feminism and that has been particularly prominent in contemporary Anglophone media and popular culture.<sup>5</sup> For my analysis of Irene Adler’s afterings, I find Rosalind Gill’s expansion of McRobbie’s work particularly useful. As I have noted in the previous chapter, Gill switches attention from the contested descriptive term ‘postfeminism’ to a ‘postfeminist sensibility’ permeating media products, allowing for the detection and analysis of the ways in which contemporary media conceptualise and represent gender (Gill 2007, pp. 254–255). Moreover, Gill identifies the following characteristics as central to postfeminist representations of women’s subjectivity and identity across media:

the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification [of women]; the emphasis on self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of the makeover paradigm; a resurgence in ideas of natural sexual difference; a marked sexualisation of culture; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference. These themes [...] coexist with stark and continuing inequalities and exclusions that relate to ‘race’ and ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and disability as well as gender. (Gill 2007, p. 255)

The proposed focus on postfeminist sensibility allows for a recognition of the seemingly contradictory intertwining of feminist and deeply anti-feminist tropes: feminist goals of equal rights to education and employment are taken for granted as already achieved, while the social task of being a woman is still framed within traditional gender roles and expectations. Furthermore, as Imelda Whelehan has shown in *Overloaded* (2000), by using irony and—in a number of cases—a nostalgic setting, postfeminist media create a retro-sexist discourse that shuts down even

the possibility of critique, where any ‘objections we might feel are set up as contradictory because we are supposed to “know” that this is ironic and therefore not exploitative’ (Whelehan 2000, p. 147).<sup>6</sup> This sort of doubleness at work in postfeminist media discourse is here read as post-feminist doublespeak that gestures towards ideas emblematic of feminism through its use of feminist vocabulary while at the same time implying feminism’s outdatedness and lack of ‘cool’.

My investigation of contemporary adaptations of Irene Adler highlights an important matter that needs addressing when thinking about neo-Victorianism on screen: 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.<sup>7</sup> But before I approach the contemporary screen adaptations, a closer look at Doyle’s adapted text is in order.

### IRENE ADLER, THE *VICTORIAN* HEROINE

As Sherlock Holmes’s antagonist, the character of Irene Adler appears only in a single story, ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’ (1891), and is thereafter only mentioned by name in ‘The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle’ and ‘A Case of Identity’ (all three collected in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* 1892)—and again in ‘His Last Bow’ (first published in 1917). Doyle opens ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’ with the following description from Watson’s perspective, which I quote at some length here for clarity’s sake:

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

not be more disturbing than a strong emotion in a nature such as his. And yet there was but one woman to him, and that woman was the late Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable memory. (Doyle 1994, p. 3, original emphasis)

It is, in other words, fairly obvious from the very beginning of this late Victorian story that Irene Adler will not just be the only woman to outsmart the *über*-rational detective, but also the woman to redefine Holmes's dismissive view of the whole sex. Furthermore, she is transformed from a suspected villain into a wronged woman in the course of the narrative. The king of Bohemia, anxious to go through with an arranged royal marriage to a morally upright Scandinavian princess, hires Holmes to locate and steal the photograph in Adler's possession that is the only remaining proof of his youthful involvement with her and their engagement. He suggests that she is blackmailing him out of jealousy; however, by the end of the story it appears she has kept the photograph as a means of protection. Adler earns Holmes's respect by staying one step ahead of him and foiling his plan to steal the photograph. She quickly realises Holmes had come under her roof in the disguise of a clergyman in order to discover the hiding place of the photograph, follows him dressed in male attire and, having ascertained his identity, cockily bids him goodnight as she passes him. The following day she disappears from London, having married her lawyer the day before and having made Holmes an inadvertent witness at the ceremony. She leaves a photographic portrait of herself for the king and a letter addressed to Holmes in the hiding place she knew he would find. Even though the rescue of the incriminating photograph is thwarted, the king is relieved and offers any reward Holmes desires. Holmes, curiously, claims Adler's portrait, which the self-absorbed, jubilant king grants gladly. The conclusion of the story reads as follows:

And that was how a great scandal threatened to affect the kingdom of Bohemia, and how the best plans of Mr. Sherlock Holmes were beaten by a woman's wit. He used to make merry over the cleverness of women, but I have not heard him do it of late. And when he speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honourable title of *the* woman. (Doyle 1994, pp. 28–29)

Holmes's reaction is admiration, deference, and respect—a rare show of esteem on the part of the proverbially cold detective, especially toward

the opposite sex. What is more, the case is not solved by Holmes; one may say there was no case at all. The reason for the client's fear of scandal—which makes him turn to Holmes in the first place—is removed by Adler, and the title of the story proves to be misleading, since the scandal never takes place anywhere other than in the mind of Holmes's client, the King of Bohemia. Moreover, the real mystery to be solved by Holmes, as he works his way through innuendo, speculation and prejudice, is the riddle of Adler's character.

*The woman presents a puzzle to Holmes, claims Pascale Krumm, because she is a woman and, as such, according to Victorian conceptions of gender differences, remains a Freudian *dark continent* (Krumm 1996, p. 194). Moreover, even though Holmes himself is a master of disguise, he fails to recognise the body of a woman in disguise; as Rosemary Jann comments, 'feminine sexuality eludes the rational solution of mystery promised by the Holmes stories' (Jann 1990, p. 687). Adler is described as 'the daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet' by the loiterers in her neighbourhood and, by Holmes himself, as 'a lovely woman, with a face that a man might die for' (Doyle 1994, pp. 15, 17). At the same time, she is a gender-bending creature who easily slips in and out of male disguise, thanks to her training as an actress and her deep contralto, and she not only possesses, in the king's words, 'the face of the most beautiful of women' but also 'the mind of the most resolute of men' (Doyle 1994, pp. 12, 13).*

Adler's ability to shape-shift and cross gender barriers adds to her mystique, but first and foremost it qualifies her as an autonomous subject. Doyle's Adler acts on her own behalf and has her own agenda: she does not depend on anyone else to help her make her decisions or execute her plans, nor is she in someone else's employ. Her transformations highlight her control over her own body and identity. Furthermore, in the context of the Holmsean canon, her ability to plan ahead, shape-shift and cross-dress mark her as Holmes's match, since the detective is repeatedly described not only as an extraordinary reasoner but also as a master of disguise. The story thus introduces the notion of equality between Adler and Holmes in terms of intelligence, resourcefulness and wit. In this regard, it is not without consequence that Carole Nelson Douglas's mystery novel *Good Night, Mr Holmes* (1990) takes the inspiration for its title from Adler's cheeky greeting to Holmes while in male disguise, and that both this novel and the Granada Television's episode 'A Scandal in Bohemia' from 1984 (with Jeremy Brett as



Holmes and Gayle Hunnicutt as Adler) retain Doyle's ending as well as the characterisation of Irene Adler as a self-reliant, independent and resourceful opera singer.

### A SHAPE-SHIFTING SLEUTH: IRENE ADLER IN NEO-VICTORIAN FICTION

*Good Night, Mr Holmes* is the first novel in Carole Nelson Douglas's series of Irene Adler mysteries, featuring the retired *prima donna* of Doyle's text as a detective. This metamorphosis of Irene Adler's character, at least in this first instalment in the series, has been identified as neo-Victorian by Ann Humpherys and as a feminist revision by Sabine Vanacker because of its playful approach to Victorian gender roles (Humpherys 2007, p. 446; Vanacker 2013, p. 95). Even though Adler eventually conforms to the dominant social mores and marries Geoffrey Norton, following Doyle's plot, the relationship is depicted as a marriage of equals and partners. The novel thus adheres to Doyle's narrative outline and characterisation, making Adler an intelligent and active subject who possesses independent agency and subjectivity.

Among other things, the first novel depicts Adler's identity through her ability to transform herself through a constant recycling and reconstruction of her clothing. These transformations are reported in detail by Adler's sidekick, Penelope Huxleigh, a parson's daughter and spinster who serves as a counterpart to Holmes's doctor Watson inasmuch as she is the voice of Victorian propriety and decorum. Huxleigh's ability to appreciate Adler's sartorial accomplishments is explained by her having been an apprentice at a draper's shop (see Douglas 1990, pp. 15, 17, 37). Adler's unconventional attitudes to gender roles, marriage and the woman's sphere, constantly commented on by Huxleigh with a mixture of awe and disapproval, are inextricably intertwined with Adler's fluid visual identity caused by her need to assume any disguise necessary for her detective work:

Despite its lavish appearance, her wardrobe consisted of surprisingly few ensembles. The jumble of hand-me-down trims she collected in street markets transformed this raw material to fit any occasion, station in life or mood that suited her. Nor did Irene give a fig leaf for how nicely she accomplished her transformations. Often of an evening, I, who had been taught to sew spider-fine stitches, would watch Irene driving her

large-eyed needle in great galloping strides as she affixed a glittering swag of trim on a plain-Jane gown. The same long, loose stitches would be as roughly ripped free when the gown required another change of character. (Nelson Douglas 1990, pp. 64–65)

Such sartorial transformations and artful refashionings of her persona stress the resourcefulness and intelligence of Adler's character. They also highlight the performative character of Adler's femininity that partly recalls Joan Riviere's problematic yet persistently intriguing conceptualisation of womanliness as masquerade, where each new mask of femininity ('a glittering swag of trim') is put on as a means to compete with men without posing an open challenge to their masculinity (cf. Riviere 1929, pp. 41–44). Intriguing, since in contemporary media a woman is still perceived to need to play down her abilities and carefully police her appearance so as not to cross the thin line between 'empowered' femininity and aggressive masculinity—she needs to be seen, in short, not to be transgressing her 'natural' state—if she seeks access to power, as was well exemplified by the treatment of Hilary Clinton during the 2016 presidential election campaign in the USA. As Mary Beard has pointed out,

The shared metaphors we use of female access to power – knocking on the door, storming the citadel, smashing the glass ceiling, or just giving them a leg up – underline female exteriority. Women in power are seen as breaking down barriers, or alternatively as taking something to which they are not quite entitled. (Beard 2017, p. 9)

In this context, womanliness as a masquerade, understood as an intentional use of ostentatious conventional femininity, shows itself to be the one persistent if ambiguous stratagem for woman's access to power that ties together the pre-feminist and postfeminist discourses on women's agency. Framed as a strategic use of 'feminine wiles', it will become particularly relevant in contemporary screen adaptations of Irene Adler in which she is stripped of the intelligence and resourcefulness that is granted to her by Doyle's text and its neo-Victorian rewriting by Nelson Douglas.

Observed from a meta-level, Adler's ability to shape-shift can also be read as emblematic of the process of neo-Victorian adaptation itself. In this reading, the adapted text becomes the 'plain-Jane gown' and the 'glittering swag' stands for the often dazzling effect of adaptive

interventions that create new, engaging spectacles. While such ‘glittering swag’ can take the shape of creative and critical reworkings of the adapted text, such as Nelson Douglas’s transformation of Adler into a successful (proto)feminist sleuth, it can also take the ambivalent form of postfeminist re-visionings of Adler as a criminal (*Elementary*, the Guy Ritchie films) or sex worker (*Sherlock*) where the shock of the adaptation’s focus on the heroine’s ostentatiously empowered sexy body overshadows or obscures troubling limitations to her agency.

### GUY RITCHIE’S ‘DANGEROUSLY ALLURING’ ADLER

There has been a long tradition of depicting Irene Adler as Sherlock Holmes’s love interest in Holmesian afterings, for example, in the TV film *Sherlock Holmes in New York* (1976), the fictional biography of Sherlock Holmes by William Stuart Baring-Gould, *Sherlock Holmes: A Biography of the World’s First Consulting Detective* (1962), John T. Lescroart’s novel *Son of Holmes* (1986) or *The Language of Bees* (2009) by Laurie R. King.<sup>8</sup> Guy Ritchie’s action-packed Holmes films follow in those footsteps, adding another adaptive layer: hence in *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), Irene Adler is introduced as Holmes’s long lost love, a *femme fatale* he never quite got over. The posters for the film featuring Rachel McAdams as Adler stress this aspect and add the tagline ‘dangerously alluring’. The films play on the erotic tension between the two leads, providing entertainment through the sexually charged games they play to outwit each other. On screen, the elision of female agency takes place through a paradoxical representation of Adler as supposedly empowered and in control *because* of her overt sexuality and her reliance on her body as a weapon. Such use of a woman’s body and sexuality—as a means of ‘empowerment’—and the focus on the ‘sexy body’ fit in with Rosalind Gill’s definition of contemporary postfeminist media (cf. Gill 2007, p. 255). In Guy Ritchie’s films, the ‘empowered’ Adler is reimagined as feisty, sexually and physically active, a heroine with her own agenda, reluctant to be tied down by the rules of propriety—yet, ultimately, a heroine whose agency is reinscribed within a patriarchal system of power-play. Adler in Ritchie’s films fails to be more than a saucy, sexy criminal. Her agency, heavily reliant on her use of sexuality and her own body, is safely neutralised by the cold-blooded criminal mastermind Moriarty who turns out to be her employer; moreover, at the beginning of the second film in the franchise, she is quickly killed off once she is no longer

useful to him. In this appropriation of the Holmesian canon, the sexual power of the female is contrasted to male rationality only to be found wanting and then summarily crushed.

Irene Adler's *faux* empowerment is most visibly performed on the most superficial of levels: by means of costume and clothing in general. In the very first scene in which she appears, she is stylishly dressed in a corseted magenta dress-suit and a matching pork-pie hat, awakening Holmes by cracking nuts with her gloved hands, metaphorically announcing the beginning of the battle of the sexes they will perform throughout the narrative. Her next meeting with Holmes takes place in a hotel room, where she puts him off guard by performing a striptease behind a screen while he waits. Using her body and physical allure as a weapon, she drugs him and leaves him naked (save for a strategically placed cushion) and handcuffed to the bed, and his nude body is played for laughs in the next scene when he wakes up. In the later scenes, however, in which she ostensibly works alongside Holmes (unbeknownst to him, with ulterior motives) to foil the villainous Lord Blackwood's plan for imperial domination, she is wearing a tweed three-piece trouser suit. She manages to temporarily get the better of Holmes by stealing a part of the machine he is looking for and making her escape, but it is not long before Holmes catches up with her. In other words, once she is stripped of her feminine clothing and is on the same sartorial level as Holmes, Adler loses the advantage of her feminine mystique—of womanliness as a mask and a weapon—and she is beaten.

What Ritchie's films share with *Sherlock*, Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss's TV series adaptation for BBC, is the fact that neither seem to be able to handle Doyle's scenario in which she beats Holmes at his own game. The most troubling aspect of these recent screen afterings, as Esther Inglis-Arkell (2013) bluntly put it in her web article on Adler in Ritchie's films and *Sherlock*, is that they both do away with Adler's autonomy. Unlike in the story by Doyle or the novel by Nelson Douglas, where she is first and foremost an opera singer, in Ritchie's films Adler becomes Holmes's nemesis primarily because she is an accomplished criminal who uses his weakness for her to get the better of him. This re-visioning of Adler reduces her to Holmes's love interest and a sexy criminal who dies at the beginning of *The Game of Shadows* (2011), after having been manipulated and discarded by Holmes's enemy, Moriarty.

## IT'S RAINING WOMEN: ADLER, WATSON AND MORIARTY AS WOMEN IN *ELEMENTARY*

Robert Doherty's modern-day relocation of Holmes to contemporary New York City in *Elementary* goes another couple of steps further away from Doyle's text. Irene Adler (Natalie Dormer)<sup>9</sup> is first introduced in a flashback in episode twenty-three of the first season called, with a nod to the canon, 'The Woman' (2013), where she is portrayed as a skilled painter-forger employed by the British Museum in the capacity of a restorer. She is Holmes's one true love, and a *femme fatale* after whose disappearance he became a heart-broken heroin user. His subsequent expulsion from Scotland Yard is depicted as the reason for his new start as a recovering addict and consulting detective in New York, where his father arranges for him to live with a 'sober companion' in the shape of a (female) doctor Joan Watson (Lucy Liu). However, by the end of the episode, 'Irene Adler' is revealed to be just an alias used by the criminal mastermind Jamie Moriarty,<sup>10</sup> who uses her body and sexuality to manipulate Holmes—and others. While the show introduces a novel take on the characters of Watson and Moriarty by making them both women, it remains beholden to postfeminist sensibility: both are portrayed as attractive, immaculately coiffed and groomed, and as such aware of their bodies; they also embody the different sides of postfeminism's double entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist attitudes to femininity. While Moriarty/Adler uses her body as a weapon to get what she wants, behaving like the empowered man-eater of anti-feminist diatribes, Watson is depicted as chick-lit's typical single Everywoman in her late 30s/early 40s confined by the social demands of heterosexual normativity (notably, her married female friend creates an online dating profile for her, pushing her into a series of numbing dates that she feels obliged to go through as part of the socially prescribed quest for Mr Right). The post-feminist doublespeak also shows itself at work on the level of plot's powerplay: even though Watson may provide Holmes with the strategy with which to entrap Adler/Moriarty, ultimately the victory—as well as the narrative thread—belongs to Holmes. This is further confirmed when Holmes, in an act of reconciliation and gratitude, names a new bee species after Watson. While Watson may be the busy bee that figures out Adler/Moriarty's mind thanks precisely to her gender (since, in an overlooked—or is it tacit?—instance of the show's postfeminist essentialism, only a woman can truly understand what makes another woman tick),

it is Holmes who is the bee-keeper with the power of naming—and ultimately, the one in control (*‘My nemesis has been defeated’*, he proclaims; 01:25:00). At the same time, Adler/Moriarty is depicted as an unabashed villain: dressed in sleek outfits that vary from minimalist to military chic, she is the head of an organisation that arranges assassinations across the globe, a woman who gives up her child for adoption so that she could carry on with her criminal career. While her agency is that of a criminal who puts her personal gain (including financial profit as well as the pleasure gained from manipulating world events) ahead of the lives of innocent people, she can still only ever temporarily beat Holmes. This reluctance to grant the female protagonist the upper hand is repeated in BBC’s *Sherlock*. A close study of the use of costume in *Sherlock*’s ‘A Scandal in Belgravia’ helps to expose the crux of the problem.

#### NAKED FEMALE BODY AS A BATTLEDRESS: POSTFEMINIST IRENE ADLER IN *SHERLOCK*

‘A Scandal in Belgravia’ is an episode directed by Paul McGuigan which updates and reimagines Doyle’s story in a contemporary London context. The writers of the episode, Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, effectively diminish Adler’s agency even more than Ritchie’s films or Doherty’s show. The opera singer, transformed into a private detective by Nelson Douglas, and into a criminal by Ritchie and Doherty, here becomes a willowy dominatrix who blackmails her clients by photographing them in compromising positions. The juxtaposition of this supposedly gay glorified sex-worker with the virginal asexual Sherlock (Benedict Cumberbatch) is the source of much humour and sexual innuendo in the ninety-minute episode.<sup>11</sup> Holmes and Adler’s ‘battle’ is preceded by each character’s careful search of their wardrobes for the perfect attire in which to face each other. In the scene of confrontation at her establishment, Sherlock arrives, referencing Doyle’s text, disguised as a clergyman, and ends up confronted by a nude Adler (played by Lara Pulver). By taking away his collar, a triumphant Adler pronounces, ‘we are both defrocked’, adding that the biggest problem with disguise is that ‘however hard you try, it always is a self-portrait’ (00:24:28–00:25:36). Sherlock, used to reading people by picking up on the details of their clothing, is baffled: the naked body in front of him refuses to give into his analytical eye, which is comically emphasised through a use of superimposed question marks on screen.

When asked by her assistant before this confrontation, ‘What are you going to wear?’, Adler responds, ‘My battledress’ (23:12–23:16). The battledress turns out to be her own unclothed body, diamond earrings, a pair of Christian Loubutin high heels—and a hairdo reminiscent of late nineteenth-/early twentieth-century hairstyles. This use of naked flesh can be observed as the use of ‘nudity as costume’, as Heidi Brevik-Zender puts it in her discussion of Catherine Breillet’s adaptation of Jules-Amédée Barbey d’Aurevilly’s French nineteenth-century classic *Une vieille maîtresse* (Brevik-Zender 2012, p. 204). Adler’s carefully applied blood-coloured lipstick along with her blood-red-soled Loubutin stilettos and diamond jewellery here function in the same way, as a reinforcement of ‘the suggestion of nakedness as a form of garment’ (Brevik-Zender 2012, p. 215). Adler’s naked body paradoxically turns out to be her most successful disguise, a veritable battledress that keeps her safe from Holmes’s scrutinising gaze. This use of the naked body as a dress, and the camera’s direction of the viewer’s attention to it (sutured with Holmes’s scrutinising gaze) merit a pause for reflection.

In her discussion of clothes in fiction Clair Hughes has pointed out that ‘references to dress for both the reader and writer contribute to the ‘reality effect’: they lend tangibility and visibility to character and context’ (Hughes 2006, p. 2). Hughes stresses that clothes ‘can also operate as the author’s personal sign-system, conscious or unconscious’ (Hughes 2006, p. 2). This has correspondences with Stella Bruzzi’s work on the use of clothes in film. Bruzzi proposes that costume dramas should roughly be divided into two kinds: those that look *through* clothes and those that look *at* them (Bruzzi 1997, pp. 35–36). The former category, which Bruzzi dubs ‘liberal’, uses clothing as merely a marker of a particular era, augmenting the period’s authenticity on screen for the viewers. The latter kind of costume films she names ‘sexual’, since they draw the attention of the viewer to the clothes, making them look *at* the clothes and the hidden story that revolves around their interaction with the body and sexuality, often revealing fetishistic undercurrents (Bruzzi 1997, p. 36). In the process, the clothes draw attention to the eroticism usually hidden in the adapted text. Looked at from this perspective, ‘A Scandal in Belgravia’ can be read as an example of the costume drama that looks *at* the clothes, suggesting a hidden narrative behind the focus on nudity—which is not only used to depict Adler.

The episode opens with Sherlock’s eccentric refusal to either put on clothes or to leave the house as he attempts to solve a case from his living

room via a video-link. Even when he is dragged willy-nilly to Buckingham Palace by secret agents, he insists on going in a bed sheet and stubbornly refuses to replace it with clothes. He succumbs only after an argument with Mycroft (Mark Gatiss) renders him partially exposed in front of Watson and the Queen's employee. As in Ritchie's film, Holmes's nudity on screen is played for laughs. However, here it is additionally used as a sign of non-conformism, and in order to characterise him as petulant, obstinate and, as such, child-like, which will quickly be associated with his supposed ignorance in matters of sexuality when Mycroft discusses Adler's business website, *The Woman*. Holmes is further cast as being sexually inexperienced through his choice of disguise (a clergyman) and Moriarty's nickname for him, 'the Virgin'. As such, he serves as Adler's opposite, for she is unequivocally contrasted with him as *the* whore in all but the name. Moreover, and crucially, contemporary postfeminist media discourse also makes it possible to reimagine Irene Adler as a sex worker by choice (cf. Adler's leitmotif in *Sherlock*: 'I go through the world, I misbehave') and frame such an interpretation as an example of her own empowerment, which is made to appear glamorous through a series of scenes that dwell on the luxurious retro-Victorian décor of her house.

The episode depicts Adler's use of nudity as intentionally manipulative, characterising her, in a most stereotypical manner, as a temptress and a *femme fatale*. This is further emphasised with her titillating attire, consisting—at the beginning of the episode—of a series of see-through negligees and sexy underwear.<sup>12</sup> When she plays at being a detective, this is also registered symbolically: in the scenes in which she discusses (and eventually, independently figures out) the mysterious case that Holmes had already solved via videolink she suspends her fetishistic power by taking off her stiletto heels and covering her naked body with Holmes's trademark coat. Since she merely wears the disguise of the detective, she just about keeps up with Holmes's line of deduction, but only succeeds in solving the puzzle after she literally beats him into submission with a whip. At the end of the episode, when blackmailing Mycroft, she further proves that she lacks the ability to act on her own and as Sherlock's intellectual equal by saying: 'I had a bit of help. Jim Moriarty sends his love. *I had all this stuff, and never knew what to do with it.* Thank God for the consulting criminal!' (01:19:02–01:19:14).

The 'updating' of Adler as a dominatrix and a sexual woman gives her only the temporary power of the female body as fetish and a very stereotypically 'Victorian' narrative destiny. As soon as she 'overreaches'



her limits of agency as a sexualised body, Adler promptly falls/fails, is humiliated and is punished. Hence, in her last appearance in the episode, she is reduced to the most oppressed image of the female body in current Western media: that of the hijab-wearing (Muslim) woman, waiting either to die or to be rescued by a male hand. Not only does this image confirm her loss of agency, it also reaffirms what McRobbie terms the postfeminist gendered ‘boundaries between the West and the rest’ (McRobbie 2009, p. 1), curiously introducing belated Orientalist notions about colonial space that are not present in Doyle’s story, and which I will discuss in more detail below. The contemporary Holmes cannot be bested by a woman; moreover, instead of possessing the mind ‘of the most resolute of men’ (Doyle 1994, p. 13), the contemporary detective’s female antagonist is now reduced to a sexualised body which is, to paraphrase Holmes’s derisive comment at the end of the episode, dominated by *sentiment*.

### FROM NUDITY TO HIJAB: NEO-VICTORIAN ORIENTALIST POSTFEMINISM

In the recent postfeminist screen afterlives, Adler becomes a character who relies first and foremost on her ‘feminine wiles’. Like so many other postfeminist heroines, beginning with Carrie Bradshaw and her posse in HBO’s series *Sex and the City*, she may be financially independent, sexy and sexual, but her freedom does not imply social power. Instead, the postfeminist woman’s freedom is coded as freedom to consume (clothes, shoes, underwear, men) and eventually to conform to social rules (or else, if she does not, she is punished like *Sex and the City*’s Samantha who she gets cancer). The postfeminist Adler is reduced to using her naked body as a weapon primarily to blackmail people (rather than for her own pleasure)—and on relying on powerful male figures such as Moriarty for whom she works.

Whereas Doyle’s Adler beats Holmes at his own game by outsmarting him, in McGuigan-Moffat-Gatiss’s BBC TV series she becomes just a dominatrix who literally beats him. Adler appears to be reduced to the worst of the late Victorian and turn-of-the-century stereotypes put forward by Otto Weininger in *Sex and Character* (1903)—the highly sexed female body preoccupied with sex and who employs her sexuality as a means of control over men.<sup>13</sup> This reduction is completed in the BBC aftering when Sherlock beats Adler at her own game of blackmail and

humiliates her by rejecting her playful attempts at seduction. And that is not all: the humiliated, beaten and prospect-less Adler is, at the very end of the episode, reduced to a crouching damsel in distress, miraculously saved from death by Holmes himself.

The degradation of Adler develops visually through the onscreen use of costumes. By the end of the episode, the dangerously sexual female nude body of the metropolitan centre is displaced into a Pakistani desert and transformed into a kneeling powerless bundle of indigo-blue wraps that set off her tear-sodden face. The luminous skin of her 'battledress', of the naked female body-as-weapon, is supplanted by a crestfallen figure in a hijab. In a stereotypically Victorian fashion that does not feature in Doyle's text, Adler's use of her own body as a means of power turns her into a fallen woman who has to be punished, banished to the former colonial space and saved by the hero.

The sensational use of nudity, counterpointed by the even more sensationally melodramatic use of hijab and the (ex-)colonial space at the end of the show, performs a rather suspect turn. This crucial issue is one that screen adaptations of Victorian heritage partly share with neo-Victorian fiction, namely its obsession with sensational representations of Victorians' sexuality and sexual lives,<sup>14</sup> a practice that Marie-Luise Kohlke has dubbed 'sexsation', and which often goes hand in hand with a belated, modern-day 'new Orientalism' that locates the exotic Other in the Victorian past (Kohlke 2008, pp. 11–18). Kohlke's concept of 'sexsation' informs this chapter's study of the push and pull between, on the one hand, the sensationalist urge to 'liberate' the Victorians of the adapted nineteenth-century text by introducing nudity and sexually risqué narrative elements on screen and, on the other hand, a simultaneous, less obvious and arguably nostalgic neo-conservative (re)introduction of traditional gender roles. Whether in fiction or on screen, these afterings of Victorian intimacy invariably envisage themselves as enlarging the story of the Victorians by putting sex in, thereby supposedly setting Victorian characters free from the shackles of their social mores, and titillating readers and viewers in the process. However, rather than exhibiting an unequivocally liberating potential, the neo-Victorian exposés of Victorian sexual hypocrisy and gendered oppression lose their impact in the sheer repetition of these tropes.<sup>15</sup> When looked at cumulatively, this 'sexsation' turns into a dominant, *prescriptive* narrative that clouds the ideologically suspect undercurrents at work. The 'sexsation' of the screen adaptation performs the superficial liberation of the Victorian

text by putting the nudity and sexuality in but it comes nowhere close to acknowledging the agency and autonomy of the adapted Victorian heroine or allowing her a happy ending on her own terms. Furthermore, the obsession of contemporary neo-Victorian adaptations with ‘updating’ Victorian narratives and characters through the addition of sex and nudity performs an ethical as well as an aesthetic turn that sabotages the feminist potential of the texts that they adapt.

If, as Marie-Luise Kohlke suggests, contemporary writers of neo-Victorian fiction use the Victorian past in the same way that the Victorian writers used the Orient—as the space of the Other—the contemporary screenwriters of *Sherlock* return to Orientalist notions of colonial space and interpolate them in their updating of this late Victorian text. Warning of the dangerous political implications behind the conflation of ‘liberty with sexual liberation, or knowledge with sexual knowledge’, Kohlke stresses that

[s]uch reductionism extends to international relations, as in the appropriation of the figure of the Afghan woman, shrouded in her *burqa*, to help justify the U.S. led NATO intervention in Afghanistan, a move that might be compared to the Victorian’s [sic] treatment of the Indian practice of *suttee*. As Emily Haddad points out, ‘[m]uch European condemnation of oriental tyranny arose (and still does) from moral indignation at the presumed oriental subordination of women.’ (Kohlke 2008, p. 354)<sup>16</sup>

*Sherlock* uses exactly that same Orientalist image of the oppressed woman within the former colonial space, alongside Watson’s status as an Afghanistan war veteran, to further stress the parallels between the past and the present, between the position of women in the ‘Orient’ then and now, between the justifications for military intervention then and now. In the intertextual manner of historiographic metafiction, *Sherlock* interrogates the extent of our knowledge about the Victorian past as well as the notion of our distance from it, questioning the idea of progress. Nowhere is this clearer than in the final image of the subjugated, veiled Irene Adler.

The unexpected appearance in *Sherlock* of the orientalised figure of the veiled woman works on two levels. It functions as visual shorthand for oppressed women of the former colonial space and implicitly supports the justifications for UK and US military interventions post 9/11 which, indeed, uncannily echo the British orientalist discourse

about the subjection of Indian women in the Victorian period. On the one hand, the oppressed, veiled woman's body serves both to reinforce the postfeminist notion of freedom defined by the image of an overtly sexual Western woman, and to remind of the pre/anti-feminist notion that the naked body of the liberated woman deserves punishment, for those are 'the wages of sin'. What is more, instead of re-visioning the Victorian text in such a way as to recuperate the marginalised characters and storylines, this recent postfeminist adaptation of Doyle's 'A Scandal in Bohemia' introduces stereotypes about Victorian understanding of gender and colonial space. In other words, such a postfeminist adaptation of Adler, in fact, signals a return to the stereotypically understood Victorian.

### CONCLUSION

In the contemporary screen adaptations of Irene Adler, the stereotypically overdressed Victorian woman that featured in the 1984 Granada Television's eponymous adaptation of 'The Scandal in Bohemia' slowly gives way to the tightly-laced, sexualised tom-boyishness of Rachel McAdams in the Guy Ritchie version, which is updated to the casual military sartorial choices of Natalie Dormer's Adler as Moriarty in *Elementary*, culminating in the naked body of Lara Pulver in BBC *Sherlock's* 'A Scandal in Belgravia'. When analysed together, these depictions point to ostensibly liberated and highly sexualised depictions of women whose agency, however, becomes increasingly more limited on screen—particularly when contrasted with the nineteenth-century text they use as a starting point. *Elementary* attempts a novel twist by making Adler/Moriarty a *femme fatale*, Holmes's one true love, *and* the head of an international criminal organisation all wrapped into one. However, this fusion of the two prominent characters from the Holmes canon opens up more problems than it solves (one of them being the offhand representation of Adler's motherhood). What is also noticeable is that in these recent adaptations Adler is depicted as a criminal who uses her sexuality and her body to get the better of Holmes and achieve her goals. And yet—in a further departure from the Victorian text—she ultimately fails to outsmart Holmes and beat him at his own game. Similarly, 'A Scandal in Belgravia' and Ritchie's films use the spectacle of the female body and the sexualisation of the narrative to perform a disturbingly straightforward crippling of the subjectivity and agency of the Victorian heroine.

By staging a superficial liberation of the Victorian woman through the onscreen use of nudity and sexuality, contemporary adaptations reinforce the stereotypical view of the Victorian era as repressed both in terms of gender and sexuality, while at the same time they distract the audience's attention from its own retro-sexist, conservative treatment of women's agency in which women are reduced to their bodies and cannot match men when it comes to intelligence and reasoning. In this sense, 'A Scandal in Belgravia', Doherty's *Elementary* and Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* films are neo-Victorian due to their apparent drive to rewrite and re-vision the Victorian text(s). Interpolated nudity is all the more provocative because it relies on perceived notions of Victorians as being, by definition, repressed and 'buttoned up'. By introducing the spectacle of nudity and sexual innuendo thinly veiled as the sexual liberation of the Victorian text and the Victorian character, they surreptitiously introduce a much more reactionary aftering of Adler. In the process, they end up resuscitating Victorian narrative clichés and character types of the *femme fatale*, the fallen woman and the damsel in distress, paradoxically contributing to the ossification of generalised stereotypes of the Victorians as sexually repressed victims of strict gender roles. Yet 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. However, as playful and parodic as these allusions to parallels between the Victorian past and our present may appear at first, their parody—often overlaid with humour and irony—is without noticeable emancipatory political bite, and ultimately supports the status quo. Seen in this light, these afterings may be described as 'neo-Victorian' in the less progressive sense of the word—in terms of the meaning it has in popular media, particularly in connection with UK's Conservative Party's policies.

While part of the blame for these narrative transformations that render 'A Scandal in Bohemia' a story about Holmes's supremacy over Adler could be laid at the door of generic conventions, since the detective series as a TV genre relies on the concept of the detective as an unbeatable (if invariably fallible) genius,<sup>17</sup> the fact remains that they strike an odd chord with the presumption that the contemporary context is more advanced in terms of women's equality than the Victorian era. The sexualisation of Adler in particular shows itself to be the 'glittering swag' that works as a dazzling cover for an anti-feminist rendition of female agency on screen. The generic demands along with the continuing

postfeminist suspicion towards feminism in the media result in these stunted re-visionings of female subjectivity.<sup>18</sup>

If adaptations are popular because, as Linda Hutcheon proposes, they offer the comfort of repetition with a difference and say as much about our own time as about the adapted text's time of creation (Hutcheon 2006, pp. 114–115), then these afterings of Adler signal that we are going through (yet another) neo-conservative era characterised by post-feminism's deceptive doublespeak. What is more, Adler's postfeminist screen afterlives indicate that, like postfeminism, neo-Victorianism possesses an ambiguous and fundamentally contradictory nature. While it can promote a re-visioned, liberating rewriting of the Victorian past, at the same time it can also be driven by rather unsavoury impulses of the nostalgic desire for the 'certainties' that this same past is popularly associated with: traditional, essentialist, heteronormative gender roles and a world order still reflecting an imperialist world-view. How the latter two are often inextricably connected in neo-Victorian nostalgic re-visionings of gender and colonial relations on screen is the subject of the next chapter.

## NOTES

1. For more on Soviet, Russian, and Croatian adaptations and appropriations of Sherlock Holmes stories, see Primorac (2015).
2. According to *The Internet Movie Database*, the character of Adler appears in a number of films and TV shows before 1990, ranging from the more straightforward adaptations (e.g. in the 1984 episode 'A Scandal in Bohemia' of Granada's TV series *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, with Jeremy Brett as Holmes and Gayle Hunnicutt as Adler) to more whimsical appropriations, such as a very camp TV film *Sherlock Holmes in New York* (1976) with Roger Moore as Holmes and Charlotte Rampling as Adler. She also receives a passing mention, in order to create a framing narrative, in *Dressed to Kill* (1946) with Basil Rathbone as Holmes.
3. In 'The Five Orange Pips' (*The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, 1892) John Openshaw, a prospective client, says to Holmes that he had heard it said that Holmes 'could solve anything' and that he is 'never beaten', to which Holmes replies: 'I have been beaten four times—three times by men and once by a woman' (Doyle 1994, p. 105).
4. See McRobbie's *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change* (2009), and Tasker and Negra's edited collection, *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture* (2007).

5. Susan J. Douglas, for example, finds the term problematic and suggests instead the expression 'enlightened sexism' (Douglas 2010, p. 9), which is, in a way, an updated take on what a decade earlier Imelda Whelehan referred to as 'retro-sexism': sexism cloaked in a knowing coat of irony (Whelehan 2000, p. 65).
6. Such a retro-sexist discourse informs *Sherlock's* breezy homophobia exemplified by the 'jokey banter' in 'The Abominable Bride' (Season Four).
7. Similarly, Imelda Whelehan notes the effect of such a use of sex in her comparison between neo-Victorian fiction on the one hand and screen adaptations of Victorian novels on the other: 'Neo-Victorian fiction alerts us to its contemporaneity, by its focus on underclasses and underworlds, on sex and socialism; adapting the Victorian in the past two decades has been all about sexing up the past, so that risqué content is almost routine and rarely shocking' (Whelehan 2012, p. 277).
8. *Sherlock Holmes in New York* (1976) even goes so far as to suggest that Irene Adler's illegitimate son, Scott, may be Sherlock's offspring.
9. The casting of Dormer also brings with it the halo of her earlier and concurrent roles in costume dramas: as Anne Boleyn, one of the most famous examples of a woman's use of her body for power play (and its precariousness!) in English history, in Showtime's royal-history-as-bodice-ripper *The Tudors* (2007–2010) and as the equally manipulative if fantasy-based queen Margaery Tyrell in HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2012–2016).
10. As such, she appears again in the following episode entitled 'Heroine' (2013); she is also mentioned in second season's third episode entitled 'We Are Everyone' (2013), only to return to make her escape from a high security prison in episode twelve appositely called 'The Diabolical Kind' (2014). She is mentioned again in episode fourteen of season three entitled 'The Female of the Species' (2015) in a manner that hints at her possible reappearance in future episodes.
11. Even though Adler provocatively says that she is gay as a retort to Watson's statement that he himself is not (00:55:15), the episode does not develop this idea any further; her having a female PA/driver hardly says anything in itself.
12. The clothes serve as a point of interactive entry for prosumers (the show's fans understood as consumers who participate in the production of the show's meaning) thanks to clever camera work and product placement. This is further encouraged through an interactive blog dedicated to the promotion of the clothes and other items used in the series, *Wear Sherlock* (<http://wearsherlock.tumblr.com/>).
13. Weininger's *Sex and Character* perfectly encapsulates misogynous views at the turn of the nineteenth into the twentieth century. Take, for instance, the following notorious claims: 'To put it bluntly, *man possesses sexual*

*organs; her sexual organs possess woman.* [...] And so it happens that a man can know about his sexuality, whilst a woman is unconscious of it and can in all good faith deny it, because *she is nothing but sexuality, because she is sexuality herself*; later Weininger asserts, that '[a] female genius is a contradiction in terms, for genius is simply intensified, perfectly developed, universally conscious maleness' (Weininger 1906, pp. 92, 189, original emphasis). In other words, the most capable thinking woman will only ever be a mere shadow of a man: education and culture are practically wasted on her. Hailed as a genius in his own short lifetime, Weininger never lived to witness the popularity of his views and their application in early twentieth-century writings against women's suffrage and the women's movement.

14. On making the Victorians sexy and sexual in recent screen adaptations of classic novels see, for example, Sadoff (2010, pp. 149–195). For a study of the representation of Victorian female subjectivity on screen through a coded use of period costume, see Chap. 4 of this book.
15. Christian Gutleben pointed out a similar effect of the central place that characters and narratives deemed marginal in Victorian fiction have in contemporary British novels set in the Victorian era. However, Gutleben connects this focus on Victorian marginal figures and narratives with the rise of political correctness in the 1980s and 1990s, the decades in which most of the novels he discusses were published: '[r]epeated from one novel to another, these politically correct perspectives, far from being subversive or innovative, become predictable, not to say redundant' (Gutleben 2001, p. 169).
16. Kohlke here cites Haddad's *Orientalist Poetics: The Islamic Middle East in Nineteenth-Century English and French Poetry* (2002).
17. The same principle can be seen at work in American modern-day versions of Sherlock Holmes, as the doctor in *House M.D.*, or as a New York based sleuth in the TV series *Elementary*. Even the earlier afterings, such as the US films with Basil Rathbone as Holmes, could not depict Holmes as fallible *on screen*; note, for instance, how Irene Adler appears in *Dressed to Kill* only in dialogue, as an off-screen intertextual reference to Holmes's onscreen besting of (another) *femme fatale*. In addition, *Sherlock*, *Elementary*, and Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* franchise all are cultural products addressed to the global market, advertised both as novel-ties (and hence, defining themselves *against* the popular expectations of a Victorian text as well as previous adaptations of the Holmes canon) and as adaptations of Doyle's *oeuvre*, using the Sherlock Holmes name as a recognisable literary and cultural brand. As such, they also claim some of the 'cool' as well as cultural capital that Doyle's detective stories possess as examples of cult literature.



18. What is more, they persistently fail to pass the basic requirements of the Bechdel test: to have at least two female characters with names who talk about subjects other than men.

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- ‘A Scandal in Belgravia’ (2012) [TV episode] Dir. Paul McGuigan, screenplay by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss. *Sherlock*, UK: BBC.

- 'A Scandal in Bohemia' (1984) [TV episode] Dir. Paul Annett, screenplay by Alexander Baron. *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, UK: Granada Television.
- Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, The* (1984–1985) [TV series] Created by John Hawkesworth. UK: Granada Television.
- 'Diabolical Kind, The' (2014) [TV episode] Dir. Larry Teng, screenplay by Robert Doherty and Craig Sweeny. *Elementary*. USA: CBS Broadcasting INC.
- Dressed to Kill* (1946) [Film] Dir. Roy William Neill, screenplay by Leonard Lee. USA: Universal Studios.
- Elementary* (2012 – present) [TV series] Created by Robert Doherty. USA: CBS Broadcasting.
- 'Female of the Species, The' (2015) [TV episode] Dir. Lucy Liu, screenplay by Robert Doherty and Jeffrey Paul King. *Elementary*. USA: CBS Broadcasting INC.
- 'Heroine' (2013) [TV episode] Dir. Seth Mann, screenplay by Robert Doherty and Craig Sweeny. *Elementary*, USA: CBS Broadcasting INC.
- House M. D.* (2004–2012) Created by David Shore. USA: Hel & Toe Films *et al.*
- Priklyucheniya Sherloka Kholmsa i doktora Vatsona* (trans. 'The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson') (1980–1986) [TV series] Dir. Igor Maslennikov, screenplay by Yuly Dunskey *et al.* USSR: Gostelradio/Lenfilm Studio Colour.
- Sex and the City* (1998–2004) [TV series] Created by Darren Star. USA: HBO.
- Sherlock Holmes* (2009) [Film] Dir. Guy Ritchie, screenplay by Michael Robert Johnson *et al.* USA: Warner Bros.
- Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011) [Film] Dir. Guy Ritchie, screenplay by Michele and Kieran Mulroney. USA: Warner Bros.
- Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon* (1942) [Film] Dir. Roy William Neill, screenplay by Edward T. Lowe, W. Scott Darling and Edmund L. Hartmann. USA: Universal Pictures.
- Sherlock Holmes and the Voice of Terror* (1942) [Film] Dir. John Rawlins, screenplay by Lynn Riggs and John Bright. USA: Universal Pictures.
- Sherlock Holmes in New York* (1976) [Film] Dir. Boris Sagal, screenplay by Alvin Sapinsky. USA: 20th Century Fox Television.
- Sherlock Holmes in Washington* (1943) [Film] Dir. Roy William Neill, screenplay by Bertram Millhauser and Lynn Riggs. USA: Universal Pictures.
- Sherlok Kholmes i doktor Vatsan* (trans. Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson) (1979) [TV series] Dir. Igor Maslennikov, screenplay by Yuly Dunskey *et al.* USSR: Gostelradio/Lenfilm Studio colour.
- 'Woman, The' (2013) [TV episode] Dir. Seth Mann, screenplay by Robert Doherty and Craig Sweeny. *Elementary*, USA: CBS Broadcasting INC.

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