Adaptation and Variation, Remaking the Dynamics of Gender in *Sherlock, a New Sleuth for the 21st Century*

Hélène Marchinal, Université de Bretagne Occidentale

Keywords: gender, genre, Sherlock, bromance, tv series

Mots-clés : genre, Sherlock, bromance, adaptation, séries télé

Gender and genre are definitely two terms easily associated with Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories. However, this study opens on a paradox: gender and reflection on sexual identity are ominously absent from Doyle's stories whereas the recent BBC TV series *Sherlock* clearly reintroduces gender issues through an ironical treatment omnipresent in all three seasons. But is this really paradoxical? After all, we are clearly faced here with a case of transcultural adaptation which, as Sarah Hatchuel underlines, usually leads to a shift in the way such issues are dealt with (Hatchuel, 2011). The point will therefore be to study how gender issues have been adapted and what this omnipresence reveals about both the sexual void of the original and its over-determination in the remake.

Before delving more fully into questions of gender and genre, we must first address the issue of remakes and remaking in the 21st century. Our approach will mirror that of Heinze and Krämer in that we see the process of remaking as a dialogic process, one that assumes previous knowledge in this case not only of Doyle's hero but also of the myriad filmic, televisual and radio versions of that hero (Heinze & Krämer, 2015). Our perspective is thus that remaking necessarily implies adapting (and vice-versa). We further agree with Heinze and Krämer in viewing remaking as a transformative process (Heinze and Krämer, 25)—an aspect especially pertinent in our discussion of gender in *Sherlock.*

We wish to explore what lies beneath these systematic references to gender. What links can we unravel between gender and genre? Is the omnipresence of gender a means to adapt a central dynamics of the genre, that of a problematic representation

of identity? Indeed, the genre's dynamics rest on the identification of a deviant creature, its stigmatization and expulsion so as to temporarily restore order, until the next "strange case". However Doyle's detective has also become a mythical figure emblematic of duality and tensions between opposites or "temporarily contradictory orders" to quote Lecercle's definition (Lecercle, 10). How does this BBC remake adapt and create? Is Hutcheon's aesthetic of the palimpsest (Hutcheon, 2006) visible in the creative dimension at work in this new series? Not surprisingly, it is still through the transgression of frontiers and a re-enactment of duality that the truly creative palimpsestic reflection is broached. Identity remains central, but the shift to the 21st-century digital age triggers a specific queerness or "inappropriate otherness", to use Harraway's terminology (Harraway, 1991), that of the digital subject.

I. Omnipresence of gender

Gender, as such, is obviously completely absent from the original stories. In Doyle's work we find rather the hackneyed and stereotypical dichotomies of the time, like the dangerous (potentially erotic) exotic female opposed to the well-bred and decent English maiden, or the respectable gentleman against the underworld's "jungle of crime". On the contrary, in the BBC new series, gender seems to come up recurrently in the script and sexual identity[1] is definitely mentioned, even becoming a joke spun from one episode to the next.

From the start, secondary characters are often used to weave this aspect into the scenario. In "The Hounds of Baskerville", the innkeepers are a gay couple and they immediately assume that Holmes and Watson need a single room. This comic scene echoes a very similar one found as early as the first episode of the first season when Mrs Hudson also presupposes that Watson is Holmes's partner. Holmes and Watson's potential bromance is thus omnipresent as it is mentioned in each episode one way or another, but the striking aspect is that it is always introduced through an outside perception, that of other characters who "assume" they are gay. The other striking facet here is that these scenes are all comic ones.

---

[1] For a complete overview of all these allusions, see Carlen Lavigne « The Noble Bachelor and the Crooked Man, Subtext and Sexuality in the BBC *Sherlock* », in L. Porter (ed.), *Sherlock Holmes for the 21rst Century: Essays on New Adaptations*, North Carolina, McFarland, 2012, pp. 13-23, and http://books.google.fr/books? d=_hnMydl5ptQC&printsec=frontcover&hl=fr#v=onepage&q&f=false. Whether this is actually a subtext is questionable as what was actually subtext in Doyle has become explicit allusions and jokes about sexuality and homoerotics in particular.

In fact, we could go further and pinpoint an ironical intertextual facet, as the potential for homo-eroticism in the Holmes-Watson relationship can be traced back to Rex Stout's famous 1941 speech "Watson was a woman"[2]. Although presented as a satire, this talk in front of a well-known Holmesian group has been read as the only way at the time of addressing the possibility of romance between two men[3]. Closer to our time, we have to mention another remake of Sherlock Holmes that is Billy Wilder's *Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* which also alludes to this potential gay relationship and is all the more relevant as Gatiss and Moffat explicitly mention the film as one of their sources of inspiration[4]. Homo-eroticism is broached but not developed by Wilder; however, another specific aspect is evoked in this adaptation. Indeed, when Watson confronts Holmes after the Russian Ballet episode, he directly asks Holmes whether there has ever been a woman in his life. The following dialogue ensues[5]:

> WATSON: Holmes, let me ask you a question– (Holmes stops) I hope I'm not being presumptuous -- but there have been women in your life?
> HOLMES: The answer is yes. (a relieved sigh from Watson) You're being presumptuous. (Watson's face falls) Good night.

This scene thus points to another dimension of Holmes, that of a complete absence of sexuality. This asexuality is also taken up by Gatiss and Moffat, in particular through the nicknames Moriarty gives the Holmes brothers: "the Virgin and the Ice Man" ("A Scandal in Belgravia") whereas Moriarty is called "Mr Sex".

Let us underline at this point that the potential bromance between the two main male characters is systematically referred to with the distance of irony, i.e. as a way of inscribing in this series another kind or level of subtext, which in fact points to a

---

[2] American crime fiction writer and creator of detective Nero Woolf. See http://www.unz.org/Pub/SaturdayRev-1941mar01-00003. See also: "There have been occasional attempts to adapt the canon to fit this idea, most notable of these being the 1987 TV-movie, *The Return of Sherlock Holme*s, featuring Margaret Colin as Jane Watson. In *Sherlock Holmes Returns* (1993), Watson was absent but the Great detective was given a female sidekick in his place." http://bloodymurder.wordpress.com/2012/03/01/lucy-liu-is-dr-watson/ (09/02/15)

[3] http://cosmoglaut.tumblr.com/post/61938019058 (09/02/15)

[4] About Wilder's film, Gatiss explains his adaptation of Mycroft was inspired by Christopher Lee. See *Timeshift* (BBC 4, 16 janvier 2014): "My version of Mycroft is entirely extrapolated from Christopher Lee's version. And what Billy Wilder did was essentially going one step further than Doyle by implying that Mycroft was the British government [which] probably means that he wasn't very nice. […] He can't bear the idea of having this kind of rogue element with his surname running around in a deerstalker". See also the interview: http://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/nov/07/mark-gatiss-sherlock-holmes and as far as Moffat is concerned: http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2010/07_july/12/sherlock2.shtml (09/02/15). Thanks to S. Le Hiress for that reference.

[5] The dialogue which immediately precedes this one is also interesting to consider and runs along the same lines as Watson's ironical comments on what people will say about them: see for example in "The Reichenbach Fall" when they escape the police handcuffed one to the other, or in "The Sign of Three" with the allusion to the swimming pool scene occurring in "The Great Game".

deciphering of fictive characters which is also systematically maintained at a distance and thus never actually tackled as a valid issue.

If we now move on to the case of women in the BBC series, female characters are clearly planted either in the domestic sphere with the emblematic example of Mrs Hudson or that of Molly Hopper (an original creation of the series) or they fall under another stereotype which does not originate in crime fiction but in the *noir* tradition of the *femme fatale* or in the stereotypes of spook movies. Thus Mycroft and Adler are flanked with sidekicks who clearly evoke Bond girls and have that same function of alluring commodities. Mary Watson and Irene Adler do not escape stereotypes either as Mary turns out to be a former CIA agent while Adler is defined through her profession, that of a dominatrix. As for Adler, she may be more than a stereotype as she is also involved in the power game of domination involving control of information and manipulation of media, i.e. the new "red thread of murder" staged by the series.

One last example: in "A Study in Pink", Watson first meets Holmes at St Batholomew's Hospital and the detective deciphers the former army doctor's past thanks to his mobile. This passage is a relevant example of the palimpsestic dimension of Moffat's and Gatiss's adaptation. The deciphering of the phone directly echoes another such passage which, this time, is to be found in *The Sign of Four* when Holmes "reads" Watson's watch (Doyle, ch.1, 1890). A fob watch could not match a 21st century context. It thus becomes a mobile but the detective's deductive train of thought enables spectators versed in the Holmes canon to immediately identify the reference. However, this metatextual posture introduces an ironical wink to the *zeitgeist* of our times as Watson's older alcoholic brother becomes a gay older alcoholic sister[6].

This example shows how gender often boils down to a decoy typical of the BBC dynamics of creative adaptation, triggering a palimpsestic effect by making visible the allusion to the hypotextual scene of the canon while enhancing the creative dynamics at work in the hypertext through a distancing process often resting on an ironical wink to the spectator, whose *en abyme* position as a receptor is thus made palpable. Hence the homo-erotic subtext between the two main protagonists becomes a playful metatextual game addressed to an audience which shares Gatiss and Moffat's knowledge of the history of adaptations of that subtext, from the 1880s to the present. At first sight, then, we could have the feeling that such stereotypes as Bond girls,

---

[6] We may add that this sister also occupies a specific position in the fanfiction world as the BBC has developped a blog of Harry/Harriet Watson although she never actually appears in the series.

Dominatrixes, domestic women, male flat-mates everybody automatically labels gay, do not really trigger any creation but rather recycle clichés and stereotypes not characterized by finesse.

II. Beneath the veneer of irony

Beneath the veneer of ironical distance, sexual identity may however be irrigating the series through two very sexually ambiguous characters who both stand in a very complex power game of submission and domination with Sherlock. Moriarty and Adler stand out in this remake, first because as in the canon they are the only two characters who actually threaten Holmes's supremacy, and, second, because they fit the profile of the criminal mastermind which contributes to the creation of Holmes's uncanny duality as they become disquieting doubles of Sherlock.

We all have in mind the typology of detective fiction and the stereotypical roles which shape it: the triad, victim, criminal and detective, has for long now been analyzed as providing the foundation of an ontological approach to identity which, according to Shoshana Fellman, can be traced back to Sophocles' Oedipus (Fellman, 1983). In terms of fictive and symbolic representations, detective fiction is a genre crystallizing the ontological crisis of the last decades of the 19th century, and the uncertainties about the definition of the human it leads to (Machinal, 2011). This tension is embodied by the main character who is always defined through duality, a duality which also appears in the narrative through the paradoxical tension between crime story and detection story, which Eisensweig calls "le récit impossible" (Eisensweig, 1986). Do we have a similar pondering of identity in this adaptation? Is sexual identity a facet which leads to a re-contextualisation of identity in a 21st-century world?

Sherlock Holmes is originally a fictive character defined by his deductive and adductive abilities, a mastermind constantly dramatizing his intellectual fits of reasoning, a staging process reinforced by his sidekick's eternal bafflement when faced with the superiority of Holmes's mind. Such a definition of the character clearly evacuates the body or corporeality as threats to the "pure mind". Thus in Doyle's canon, Watson emphasizes Holmes's lack of humanity, comparing him to a machine: "You're really an automaton, a calculating machine […] there is something positively inhuman in you at times" (Doyle, ch.2, 1890). This facet is obviously taken up in the

BBC series[7], first literally when Watson calls Holmes "You... machine" in "The Reichenbach Fall", then, through the prism of gender, thanks to a representation of Sherlock as sexless. Once again this facet is broached through Watson's questions about Holmes sexual preference in "A Study in Pink" (S1 ep. 1: 49:24-51:30) or through Mycroft's allusions to Holmes' complete lack of sexual experience ("A scandal in Belgravia", S2 ep. 1: 18:29-18:38).

Holmes is therefore assimilated to a "pure" mind, which implies occulting the body and pathos, but also presenting him as a freak through a series of comic scenes which show his complete ineptitude to socialize with fellow creatures[8]. He indeed very proudly claims to be a "highly functioning sociopath", he systematically antagonizes people, and the word "Asperger" is pronounced in an exchange between Lestrade and Watson in "The Hounds of Baskerville".

In Doyle's text, the detective's confrontation with Irene Adler is the only occasion when feelings are mentioned, and the narrator stresses the metaphor of the machine again:
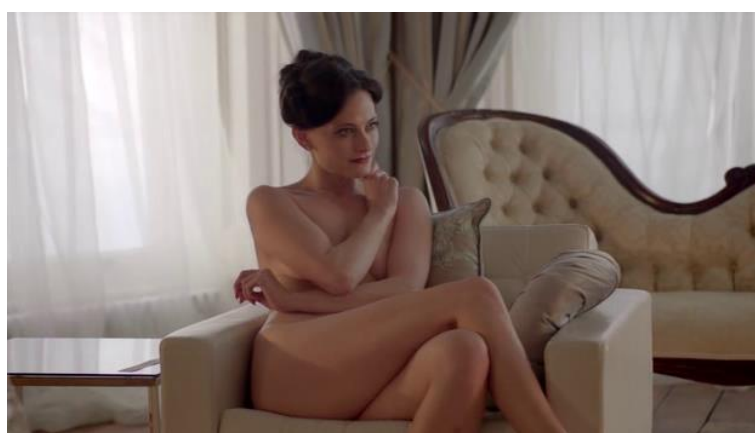
> To Sherlock Holmes she is always *the* woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex. It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, 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. ("A Scandal in Bohemia", 1891, my emphasis.)

Similarly, the BBC Sherlock rejects "feelings" as dangerous for the objective and rational approach to reality he promotes: "But sentiment, sentiment is a chemical defect found in the losing side", he tells Adler when he finally beats her. So in spite of Sherlock's systematic rejection of emotions, is he completely impervious to Adler's

---

[7] It is also one of the rare facets which connects Holmes and his brother. See "A Scandal in Belgravia" and the scene at the mortuary.
[8] These scenes often involve Anderson from New Scotland Yard who thus resumes the function of the police force in the original, that of a foil.

open eroticism and provocation? If the term "adventuress" was easy to read through for a 19th-century reading public, in the remake, Adler is also quickly perceived as in complete control of a complex power game based on sex, at the centre of which we find digital images and information as potential weapons. To Sherlock's sexless aspect is thus opposed a character highly aware of her sexual assets, who uses them to prosper but also to protect herself. Sherlock evacuates feelings and the body whereas Adler advertises the sexual services she offers on the internet and collects data as potential leverage.

"A Scandal in Belgravia"

The scene in which Sherlock and Adler are indirectly introduced to one another is striking in that respect as it rests only on images presented in alternate scenes. Beyond the wink addressed to the reader of the canon, in which all that Holmes keeps of Adler at the end is a photograph, the two characters are here introduced through what is going to be at stake between them: image and information. However, the real difference between them certainly concerns the centrality of the body. If Sherlock is sexless, the BBC Adler is literally forcing sex and the body to the front stage, first of all when she introduces herself completely naked to Sherlock, but also recurrently in the series, after she has hacked his phone and planted a sexual text message alert on it. Moffat has been accused of misogyny[9] for his approach to the character. This could be

---

[9] Here is the extract from *The Guardian* in which Moffat evokes this dimension after *The Daily Mail* started the controversy over showing nudity on TV before the 9.00pm whatershed hour. "In the latest series' first episode, Holmes was sexually discombobulated by a lesbian dominatrix who strips off in order to arouse Sherlock's sexuality from its dogmatic slumbers. I couldn't find any of this in Doyle's story A Scandal in Bohemia, from which the episode was adapted." Indeed, Moffat and Gatiss's treatment drove one critic, Jane Clare Jones writing in the Guardian, to suggest they had created a misogynistic throwback. In the original story, Irene Adler is an adventuress who outwits Holmes; in Sherlock, as Jones put it: "She's become a high-class dominatrix saved only from certain death by the dramatic intervention of our hero." She added: "While Doyle's original is hardly an exemplar of gender evolution, you've got to worry when a woman comes off worse in 2012 than in 1891."
Moffat, unsurprisingly, doesn't agree. "In the original, Irene Adler's victory over Sherlock Holmes was to move house and run away with her husband. That's not a feminist victory." He says he found Jones's argument "deeply

discussed, but in fact, it seems to me that this Adler has an almost "Femen" dimension, in the sense that she provokes Holmes and neutralizes his deciphering of people which, after all, rests on appearances and a dynamics which Denis Mellier called "l'illusion logique", i.e. the fact that the logics of detective fiction is a decoy, once again, and that Holmes's deductions are imposed on the reader (Mellier, 1995).

In terms of gender, the scene could also be read as a checkmate to gendered codes of behaviour and appearances. "Disguise is always a self-portrait" is Adler's witty aphorism to Holmes dressed as a clergyman in the scene, and Adler is clearly "performing" in that scene, in the sense that Judith Butler gives to performance as implying an act which defines the self[10]. She is also annihilating both Sherlock's disguise ("We're both defrocked") and masks in general while giving a blank page to Sherlock's brilliant mind and ability to decipher people. She literally embodies a resistance to Holmes' hermeneutic abilities and proves that the body can indeed be a very reliable means to control and dominate minds, even masterminds. "Brainy is the new sexy" is thus her way of sending body and mind back to back by encapsulating both in a formula which reduces them to an advertising slogan, exactly as when Moriarty says he has become "Mr Sex".

We've seen that Adler was one of the only criminals who actually proves to be a match to Sherlock. However, gender and sexual identity are not the facet which will eventually make of Adler a worthy opponent to Sherlock. Even if he comes close to being undone – and spoils Mycroft's and the British government's anti-terrorist attack plan – he eventually beats her on the digital battlefield[11], thus re-asserting that the battle of the sexes might be outdated and that the new arena of power is cybernetics.

The Holmes/Adler fight could then be analyzed in terms of cyber codes prevailing over gender. Adler remains a woman who has fallen prey to her feelings whereas Sherlock unlocks the camera phone she calls "her life", and thus annihilates the only worthy opponent who had threatened his deciphering abilities by opposing him gender in the nude. As in Doyle's text, Adler nevertheless remains a unique opponent, a

---

offensive". "Everyone else gets it that Irene wins. When Sherlock turns up to save her at the end it's like Eliza Dolittle coming back to Henry Higgins in My Fair Lady: 'OK, I like you, now let me hack up these terrorists with a big sword.'" http://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2012/jan/20/steven-moffat-sherlock-doctor-who?newsfeed=true, (07/02/15)

[10] J. Butler, *Gender Trouble*, NY & London, Routledge, 1990.
   http://www.lauragonzalez.com/TC/BUTLER_gender_trouble.pdf (09/02/15)

[11] At the end of "A Scandal in Belgravia", he finds the password to Adler's cameraphone which contains all the information she has accumulated to control people.

criminal Holmes somehow respects as worthy of him because "playing the game"[12] at another level, that of the intellect. Sexual overtness is, then, a facade, a costume used as an artefact in a 21rst century in which images and information can make or break a life.

Once again gender is presented as a means to disguise oneself (as when Sherlock pretends to have a girlfriend in the third series), as an act which provides one with a mask, a persona which can be identified thanks to prevailing social and generic codes but which nevertheless is only an illusion in a game. It is however striking to note that the reference to a "game" appears in Sherlock's confrontation with both Adler and Moriarty. This is in keeping with Sherlock's recurrent exclamation "Come on Watson, the game is on" ("the game is afoot" in Doyle) but in the BBC series, theatricality and fiction, which were already in Doyle's, become a means to place the audience in a metafictional posture.

III. Gender, genre and the modernization of a mythical figure?

As Christophe Gelly has shown[13], derision and irony in allusions to the hypotext serve a specific aim: they allow the resurfacing of a metatextual dimension, a questioning of the mythical dimension acquired by the figure of Holmes. As a mythical figure of modernity, Doyle's Holmes was indeed a figure of compromise in a period of tensions and changes in the iconic representation of man.

"The Hounds of Baskerville"

---

[12] When Adler is finally defeated by Holmes, she tries a last trump card by referring to their contest as a game and her feelings as true.

[13] Christophe Gelly, «*The Hound of the Baskervilles* Revisited: Adaptation in Context », Arthur Conan Doyle, *OScholars special issue*, edited by Sarah E. Maier, to be published.

This new BBC Sherlock also tackles the re-definition of human identity which appeared in the wake of cybernetics and the information revolution brought about by the digital age. Not surprisingly, the contemporary super sleuth also has to deal with the unstable frontier between the real and the virtual, between reality and fiction and he is faced with a new context, that of information, networks and screens which implicitly broach the potential porosity between man and machines.

The last episode of the second season, "The Reichenbach Fall" begins with a series of cases solved by Holmes and the emphasis is on the way the media has turned Holmes into an "Internet phenomenon", hence firmly planting this seminal episode in our contemporary screen and digital culture[14]. In the first scenes of "A Scandal in Belgravia", we also follow Holmes and Watson on their way out of a theater. Holmes grasps two hats to hide from the crowd of journalists waiting outside. One of them is a deerstalker, which is once again an ironical reference to the very mode of elaboration of the mythical dimension Holmes has acquired. Indeed, that deerstalker never appears in Doyle. It was introduced by the original illustrator Sydney Paget and then became constitutive of Holmes's image in adaptations. When Sherlock exclaims "This is not my hat", he is thus also distancing himself from the collective image various media, but moving pictures in particular, have elaborated in the public mind and implicitly points to adaptation as shaping the mythical stuff[15] Holmes is made of.

However, we once again recognize the wink to the *zeitgeist* of the time. As a prop constitutive of the image of the detective, the hat is used to bridge the gap between past and present to impose continuity through time. Therefore, Sherlock, the new icon of the media, and, *en abyme*, Sherlock the mythical figure, is going to be threatened by a Moriarty turned into a master-manipulator of images and digital information, thus introducing a reflection on image culture. If, to paraphrase Denis Mellier, detective novels were the perfect *abyme* in which we can read a meta-discourse on writing, texts and reading[16], can we find in this adaptation a meta-discourse on images and visual representation?

As in the case of Adler, Moriarty proves in "The Reichenbach Fall" that images and cybernetics are the new instruments of power in our times. In this episode, he becomes

---

[14] See Bertrand Gervais « Est-ce maintenant/Is it now ? Réflexions sur le contemporain et la culture de l'écran », Conférence donnée au Colloque Figura, Montréal, avril 2014.

[15] We are thinking of the notion of "stuff" as used by Thierry Hoquet in *Cyborg Philosophie*. See Thierry Hoquet, *Cyborg philosophie*, Paris Seuil, 2011.

[16] Denis Mellier, « L'impossibilité filmique de l'énigme policière », in G. Ménégaldo & D. Sipière (eds.), *Les récits policiers au cinéma*, *La Licorne*, Hors série – Colloque VIII, Poitiers, 1999.

an actor, a stage director and an author who controls the fiction he creates and reduces Holmes to a puppet whose strings he pulls. Fiction acquires a performative dimension as when Sherlock is led to commit suicide to "complete your [Moriarty's] story" (1:13:41) and the metaphor of fiction is the red thread of his final battle with the arch-villain, as shown by the intertext with Grimm's fairy-tales[17] and the parody of novels of the round table. Moriarty defeats Sherlock thanks to his mastery in controlling the media and editing a simulacrum of the real: "Did you almost start to wonder if I was real?" he asks Sherlock at the end of "The Reichenbach Fall" (1:09:32).

This final duel is also a potent scene both in terms of gender and genre. The two masterminds are shot using all the clichés of a western movie's final scene of confrontation, an intergeneric wink widening the scope of that key scene which ends in the canon with the deathly embrace of Moriarty and Holmes falling down into the abyss of the sublime Reichenbach Falls. A more substantial homo-erotic subtext can also be deciphered in this duel. Said subtext is introduced, once again as a decoy, when Moriarty first meets Sherlock at Molly's lab. If Adler was an ambiguous character in the original, Moriarty was not. Doyle created a typical villain and Paget's illustrations seem to corroborate that facet. Moffat and Gatiss's Moriarty is a much more shifty, deviant and unstable character, who in fact looks very much like a mirror image of the "highly functioning sociopath" Sherlock, and the scene on the rooftop underlines this Janus facet. A doppelgänger effect is gradually imposed in the episode and it clearly culminates in the final confrontation in which they become one and the same as exemplified by the following exchange (1:15:36 – 1:16:39):

> JM: Sherlock, your big brother and all the King's horses couldn't make me do a thing I didn't want to.
> SH: *(stopping and getting into Jim's face)*: Yes, but I'm not my brother, remember? <u>I am you – prepared to do anything; prepared to burn; prepared to do what ordinary people won't do</u>. You want me to shake hands with you in hell? I shall not disappoint you.
> *(Jim shakes his head slowly.)*
> JM: Naah. You *talk* big. Naah. You're ordinary. You're ordinary – <u>you're on the side of the angels</u>.
> SH: *(his voice becoming more ominous)*: Oh, I may be on the side of the angels, but don't think for one second that I am one of them.
> *(The enemies lock eyes for a long moment while Jim tries to deduce how far Sherlock will go.)*
> JM: No, you're not.
> *(He blinks, then closes his eyes briefly. Sherlock does likewise in an*

---

[17] "Genius detective prove to be a fraud [...] I read it in the paper, so it must be true. I love newspapers, fairy tales, and pretty grim ones too" ("The Reichenbach Fall", 1:11:42)

> *unintentional mirror movement. Jim smiles and opens his eyes again.)*
>   JM: *(softly, insanely)*: I see. <u>You're not ordinary. No. You're me</u>.
>   *(He hisses out a delighted laugh and his voice becomes more high-pitched.)*
>   JM: <u>You're me! *Thank* you!</u>
>   *(He lifts his right hand as if to embrace Sherlock, but then lowers it and offers it to him to shake instead.)*
>   JM: Sherlock Holmes.
>   *(They both look down at the offered hand, then Sherlock slowly raises his own right hand and takes it.)*
>   JM: *(nodding almost frenetically, though his voice stays soft)*: Thank you. *Bless* you.
>   *(He blinks and lowers his gaze as if blinking back tears.)*[18]

The homo-erotic subtext between Moriarty and Sherlock is once again going to be debunked into a decoy in the episode which follows Sherlock's fake suicide. Indeed, the porosity between fiction and reality which had been broached with Moriarty's manipulation of images and information, becomes one of the leitmotifs of "The Empty Hearse", the first episode of Season 3. This is due to the way the audience of the series reacted to Holmes' fake suicide at the end of the second season. Indeed, the last scenes of "The Reichenbach Fall" reveal that Holmes is not dead. The web then became the locus of an amazing development outside of fiction as fans started to elaborate and share possible scenarios to explain Sherlock's fake suicide. A lot could be added here in terms of reception but what is more interesting to us is the way Moffat and Gatiss actually used that interface between fiction and reality in Season 3, episode 1, "The Empty Hearse", which is also the name of a club founded by Anderson to discover how Sherlock did *not* die. The beginning of this episode presents us with a *mise en abyme* of porosity between fiction and reality within the diegesis itself. Three potential scenarios, none of which will actually be credited as valid, are proposed. Among these, one shows the fake suicide to be the plan of two lovers: Moriarty and Holmes ("The Empty Hearse", 29:05-29:50).

Once again, this kissing scene is a self-conscious wink to the audience. Yet, beneath the complicity established with spectators, gender also becomes a prop to broach the dimension that matters: the freakishness or "inappropriate otherness" of two characters whose common point is their duality as digital subjects rather than ambiguous gender. Indeed, if "The Reichenbach Fall" finishes on the idea that criminal control of the world through hacking was a red herring (1:10:53 "You don't really think

---

[18] Our emphasis.

a couple of lines of computer code are going to crush the world"), the last series ends with "the return" of Moriarty advertised on all the screens of the country with the following script "Did you miss me"? Once again, this is addressed to diegetic characters but also to the spectators, exactly as Sherlock's "digital" dimension was mainly for the audience's benefit. Indeed, Sherlock's observation of the crime scene is given to the spectators thanks to words super-imposed on screen, his machine-like facet appears in the accelerated verbal debit of his deductions, and we often see on our screen the various screens he sees within diegesis. The camera screen thus becomes an active interface between reality and fiction, between us and a digital subject.

"The Empty Hearse"

Conclusion

Gender mainly boils down to a decoy which prevents any real pondering on gender issues. However, the uncanny dichotomy of a digital subject, partly human and partly connected with machines, media, screens and networks plants the two seminal characters of the canon (i.e. Moriarty and Holmes) in the renewal of questioning on human identity which appeared in the wake of cybernetics and the emergence of screen culture.

This much more disquieting facet is literally inscribed in the medium used in this adaptation through images embedded with text addressed to viewers only. What is at stake is access to Holmes's mind and chain of reasoning, a seminal facet in Doyle's fiction as it was the very impossibility of that access which contributed to the original Holmes's mythical aura by blocking the reader's semiotic and hermeneutic function. What Gattis and Moffat have achieved, then, is the introduction of a metatextual

reflection on images and screen culture, thus successfully adapting the most interesting facet of the genre. The scenes in which we follow Holmes's mind when he dives into his "mind palace" are typical in that respect. The spectator's presence is implied by the materialization of a screen behind which we are supposed to be. Sherlock is on the other side yet we read what he sees (although we should not, as logics implies here that words appear from right to left). Both the detective and the spectator would then be simultaneously positioned as being within the computerized model of the mind which is thus implied by images themselves. At that stage, the viewer and Sherlock have thus become digital subjects.

Works cited

Films

Timeshift (BBC 4, 16 janvier 2014)

WILDER, Billy. *Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1970)

MOFFAT, Steven & GATISS, Mark. *Sherlock, a new Sleuth for the 21rst Century*, BBC, 2010-, 3 seasons.

Books and articles

DOYLE, Arthur Conan, *The Sign of Four* (1890), chapter 1. *http://literature.org/authors/doyle-arthur-conan/sign-of-four/chapter-01.html* (07/02/15)

EISENSWEIG, Uri, *Le récit impossible*, Paris, Bourgois, 1986, http://books.google.fr/books/about/Le_r%C3%A9cit_impossible.html?id=k4dZA AAAMAAJ (09/02/15)

FELLMAN, Shoshana , « De Sophocle à Japrisot (via Freud), ou pourquoi le roman policier », *Littérature 49*, février 83. See http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/litt_0047-4800_1983_num_49_1_2183 (07/02/15)

HARRAWAY, Donna, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century", in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature,* NY & London, Routledge, 1991.

HATCHUEL, Sarah, *Shakespeare and the Cleopatra/Caesar Intertext: Sequel, Conflation, Remake*, E-Book, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2011.

HEINZE, Rüdinger and Lucia Krämer, Eds., *Remakes and Remaking: Concepts – Media – Practices.* Bielefeld: transcript, 2015.

HUTCHEON, Linda, *A Theory of Adaptation*, New-York & London, Routledge, 2006.

LAVIGNE, Carlen, "The Noble Bachelor and the Crooked Man, Subtext and Sexuality in the BBC *Sherlock*", in L. Porter (ed.), *Sherlock Holmes for the 21st Century: Essays on New Adaptations*, North Carolina, McFarland, 2012.

LECERCLE, Jean-Jacques, « Dracula ; une crise de sorcellerie », in G. Menegaldo & D. Sipière (Eds.), *Dracula, Stoker-Coppola*, Paris, Ellipses, 2005, p 10. Also in *Frankenstein, mythe et philosophie*, Paris, PUF, 1998.

MACHINAL, Hélène, « Créatures et créateurs: fondements ontologiques et épistémologiques de la figure mythique de Sherlock Holmes », in Véronique Liard (ed.), *Crimes et sociétés*, Editions Universitaires de Dijon, 2011, 229-237.

MELLIER, Denis, « L'illusion logique du récit policier », *Philosophies du roman policier*, « Feuillets de L'ENS Fontenay/Saint-Cloud », ÉNS Éditions, Fontenay-aux-Roses, 1995, 77-97, https://books.google.fr/books?id=rvI6BN6pTHMC&pg=PA77&lpg=PA77&dq=mellier+illusion+logique&source=bl&ots=Ps36m6Euda&sig=0aqTZ_dmTxuLLRNjhcgFz1zMyoQ&hl=fr&sa=X&ei=OYfYVOTUC-TV7QbS0IGgBw&ved=0CCsQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=mellier%20illusion%20logique&f=false (09/02/15)