

Inspector Gadget:
The Technologically Advanced Afterlife of Sherlock Holmes



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Introduction

When creating his main character, Arthur Conan Doyle could never have foreseen that decades later the detective stories of Sherlock Holmes would still evoke such strong reactions. Although Sherlock Holmes has indeed been a commercial success over the past hundred-and-thirty years, as a fictional creation, Conan Doyle has had his difficulties dealing with his tremendous popularity. The nineteenth century audience already practically forced the author to bring his character back from the dead. Since then, Sherlock Holmes' audience and their cultural context obviously have changed dramatically. Technological advances are not the least important influences in altering the original detective stories. From the 1900's onwards, many film adaptations have been produced, all trying to adjust the detective's image in such a way that it would fit in its current setting. The most recent adaptations are the *Sherlock Holmes* movies starring Robert Downey Junior as Holmes and Jude Law as Watson and the BBC series *Sherlock* with Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman. Both have again reached millions of fans worldwide resulting in a growing demand for new episodes. With that comes a second technological development, the Internet, where an enormous fan base has been formed and the character Sherlock Holmes has found an online identity of its own. Apart from examining the statistics and numbers that indicate its popularity, this thesis will investigate the developments in British television that have supported the reinvention of the character of Sherlock Holmes. I shall argue that new technologies have not only transformed the nature of the famous 'Holmesian method' in the series itself, but have also created a new online environment that has fundamentally altered the relationship of the fans to the character and to the process of detection itself.

In this thesis, the main focus lies on the BBC series *Sherlock*, a show that may be understood as 'quality television'. Quality television is, according to Lyn Thomas, based upon two terms, namely audience size and its cultural iconic status (2), these being the constitutive elements in her understanding of quality television as an aesthetic category. What is different in the case of *Sherlock*, is that the character of Sherlock Holmes already was a deep-rooted cultural icon in British culture when the broadcasting network BBC aired the 2010 series. The

series should, due to its popularity and its use of Holmes as an icon of British heroism, be seen as part of the genre category 'quality television' as Ashley Polasek suggests. Polasek explains that by employing the term as a genre category, it implies that the series is 'cinematic in nature' and 'linked to cult television' (393). This last comparison may seem contradictory to Thomas' definition of quality television as a cult typically suggests a small audience of clever and hip people while *Sherlock* knows an extensive and varied fan audience. The series belongs to contemporary British popular culture, but does so based upon an understanding of its history, one that is merely updated to our modern standards. It is, therefore, of importance to understand its place in the mainstream in relation to the dominant culture when investigating the origins of the series' popularity.

By creating a twenty-first century variant of Sherlock Holmes, Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat actually were 'writing to fulfil a need for a new man for a new age' (Poore 4). In line with this statement, Peter Brooks stresses that Conan Doyle created a 'knowable world', one which knows certain laws of society that are recognizable by the audience. Gatiss and Moffat created a world which was very much alike the world our generation is living in today, which includes not only technological devices but also updated social laws and conventions. However, at times the stories also trespasses this world and hints at futuristic possibilities like nuclear testing in 'The Hound of the Baskervilles' and robot-like characters with inexhaustible memories like Dr. Magnussen in 'His Last Vow'. Although additions like these have made the directors the holders of the cards instead of Conan Doyle, the stories all depend heavily on the original stories. Some elements of the stories were combined and sometimes a direct parallel is present (compare 'A Study in Scarlet' to 'A Study in Pink' and 'A Scandal in Bohemia' to 'A Scandal in Belgravia').

In order to do critical justice to both the original stories but mainly to Gatiss' and Moffat's adaptation, various aspects of the BBC adaptation will be investigated in this thesis. To begin with, chapter one will address the cultural and historical context of Sherlock Holmes' afterlife including a thorough reflection on the main character and a post-modernist interpretation of the series itself and the series' main characters. Next, chapter two will

investigate earlier adaptations and the BBC's role in broadcasting new versions of the original stories. This chapter will then give an understanding of the updated cases through an in-depth analysis of each episode with emphasis on the technological advances throughout the stories. Also *Sherlock's* revamped and newly-found characters will be discussed here in context of the episodes. Finally, chapter three will summarize the various fan-bases that the series have brought to life and addresses the effects the original Sherlock Holmes stories have experienced from yet another successful adaptation.

Chapter 1: The Afterlife of Sherlock Holmes

1.1 Introduction

The original stories of Arthur Conan Doyle have been reworked in many adaptations, both in print and in film. Not all of these adaptations stuck to Conan Doyle's interest in pure detection and the creation of original crime drama. Just taking shifts in the character of Sherlock Holmes on television as a starting point reveals many interesting developments. The character of Sherlock on screen has come a long way, as he was actually 'the first fictional character adapted for television' (Gibberman 2079). Two of the latest film adaptations, Guy Ritchie's 2009 and 2011 films *Sherlock Holmes* and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*, have shown that characteristics that are more in line with those of an action-adventure character can be very successful. The original genre of the detective story is here somewhat lost, so in order to understand how the BBC *Sherlock* series have retained its style, W. H. Auden's classic exploration of the detective story may be used as a starting point. Auden has a clear, but perhaps limited definition of what a detective does, which may be used to understand the opposing technique the 2010 character of Sherlock Holmes uses. According to Auden, in 'the detective story the audience does not know the truth at all; one of the actors -the murderer- does; and the detective, of his own free will, discovers and reveals what the murderer, of his own free will, tries to conceal' (148). In essence, the 2010 Sherlock Holmes is still based on this definition, but a demanding audience and advances in technology have given a new dimension to the genre as such.

The detective stories of Sherlock Holmes and its characters have had a cult-status from the original Conan Doyle stories onwards. Still, some critics argue that in his own time, Conan Doyle was not given enough credit for his works while at the same time his works were a huge commercial success. In its opening line, the documentary *Unlocking Sherlock* introduces the 2010 series as a 'twenty-first century masterpiece based on a nineteenth century phenomenon' (0:19), which implies that the twenty-first century audience does recognize the original stories' strength. Still, the adaptations altered not only the original

stories, but also its characters, resulting in a typical Sherlock Holmes character for every generation. Because of the large amount of adaptations and their various alterations, the present-day audience may have a different take on the original stories. But in order to picture the original Sherlock Holmes as Arthur Conan Doyle envisioned him, we can only depend on his opinion of the cinematic versions that he himself saw. Due to his positive feedback on the version that Eille Norwood acted out, this may be seen as the classic version of the on-screen Sherlock Holmes. The adaptations that followed Norwood's may be described as the ghosts of that particular Holmes character, so in order to find out how the 2010 version of Sherlock Holmes became so popular by its audience, the character himself should be studied first.

1.2 The Central Character

If someone had mentioned the name 'Holmes' the last 130 years or so, one would probably associate it with the hero that Arthur Conan Doyle brought to life for his stories. The first name prominence of Sherlock in the BBC series *Sherlock* is a rather interesting contrast to Dr. Watson, who we know both by his first and last name. Where in previous adaptations Sherlock Holmes was addressed most often by his last name, the name of the series is now so closely tied to its main character that our present-day audience knows him rather by his first name. In the series itself, Sherlock is only sporadically called Mr. Holmes which even leads to confusion in 'The Empty Hearse' when Mrs. Hudson addressed both Mycroft and Sherlock by that name.

Zooming in on the man behind the character, ironically enough, Benedict Cumberbatch's own name is rather extraordinary as well. Cumberbatch, son of actors Wanda Ventham and Timothy Carlton (birth name: Timothy Carlton Cumberbatch) seemed to have gained his fame rather promptly as he 'has had a very rapid rise in the first decade of the new century' (McFarlane 174). Not only was his professional work noticed; his rather extraordinary vision in real-life was interesting as well as he is 'tall and pleasant-looking enough, with an engaging ordinariness' (174). The latter added to his acting skills which made him 'strikingly in some very high-profile films' (174). Still, his physical appearance is

far from ordinary which makes McFarlane's statement rather paradoxical. Cumberbatch's true attractiveness is not based upon a standardized look but rather upon the unusualness of his face, which is what makes him an intriguing figure for his fan audience. On top of that, like his on-screen persona, 'his somewhat unwieldy name has hardly been a hindrance' (174), as it has actually been beneficial to his fame.

In the series, Sherlock calls himself a 'consulting detective', very much in line with the typically popular consulting services of any type offered professionally over the past couple of decades. This may, therefore, seem a modern title but the true parallel is already found in the original stories. Sherlock Holmes' home is namely located near the area of Harley Street, the place where consulting physicians were situated during that time and even some still today. Next to that, both in the original stories and the 2010 series Sherlock is, in contrast to the police at Scotland Yard, an 'amateur' (Auden 156). Still, the audience holds Sherlock to be the actual expert as he proves to be so much smarter than the professionals. Evidently, his work is still what Holmes is living for, as it keeps him from being bored and having a relapse into smoking cigarettes and using drugs, another parallel to the original stories.

In the early stories Holmes was addicted to cocaine, a drug that was used to fight his boredom. In the 2010 series his addictive state is hinted at several times, although his actual drug addiction is not mentioned explicitly until the third episode of series three, 'His Last Vow'. Sherlock is addicted to smoking, but he is trying to overcome this addiction by using nicotine patches. Sherlock needs these patches in order to concentrate on the cases that he consults, which sometimes results in a need for a second nicotine patch when a case is harder to solve. This example is a direct reference to the two-pipe puzzles which Sherlock mentions in Conan Doyle's original tales. Even when he does not use these nicotine patches he always seems to be very energetic and enthusiastic about his cases. As a result of this behaviour, Ashley Polasek voices the opinion that Sherlock is the anti-hero or even 'child prodigy' (387) of the series. The child prodigy may indeed be explained through his unstoppable flow of energy, the ignoring of authority (the police) and the fact that he always has an answer whenever he is being criticized. I do not completely agree with Polasek here, as Sherlock is

definitely the hero of the series and Moriarty seems to be the typical villain. Still, these classifications may be a bit too extreme as well, as the Sherlock Holmes of the 2010 BBC series is definitely dependent on others in maintaining his status as a hero. Next to that, Moriarty can be seen to be a double for Sherlock, using the similarities between them to eventually overthrow the great detective.

Still, the character of Sherlock Holmes in *Sherlock* is not a typically likeable hero. In fact, his popularity only grows when the media is positive about him. As is shown throughout the series the media is, however, of great importance as Sherlock thus reaches an audience of ordinary Londoners. In fact, the people of London may be seen as a representation of the fan audience off-screen. As Sherlock seems uncomfortable in situations in which his fans show their admiration, his malfunctioning in social situations is again underlined. His attitude towards the outside world is indeed often mistaken for arrogance which contrasts with Dr. Watson, whose overall attitude is one of humility. Watson is often the one who helps Sherlock out in challenging social situations, but at times even Watson gets annoyed by Holmes' overconfidence which results in calling him a show-off. Sherlock's success eventually rebounds on him and in 'The Reichenbach Fall', albeit with the help of Moriarty, Sherlock's reputation crumbles.

Sergeant Sally Donovan is most outspoken in her disapproval of Sherlock Holmes and tries to warn Watson not to associate with the detective in the first episode 'A Study in Pink' already. Her main reason for doing so is that she regards him as a freak without any colleagues or friends as Sherlock 'doesn't have friends' (32:22). Donovan calls Holmes a psychopath, while critics like Bran Nicol have argued that the Sherlock Holmes in the BBC series have more in common with a sociopath. The anti-social behaviour that Sherlock displays indeed underlines this point of view. The emotional responses to cases are provided by Watson, who repeatedly confronts Sherlock with his lack of sympathy. The human aspect of Holmes is an important element in 'A Scandal in Belgravia' as Watson also writes on his blog about the unsolved cases, which are not specifically mentioned. Sherlock does not want Watson to write about these cases but Watson stresses that 'people want to know you're

human' (7:16), which could be a direct reference to the audience of the series, and not only to the blog's readers.

In the *Sherlock* series the motive of boredom still exists and is partly satisfied with the character of Moriarty who, as mentioned before, in a way acts as a double for Sherlock. In episode Three of season One, 'The Great Game', Sherlock's enemy stresses they were made for each other. Sherlock not only needs his work in order to overcome his boredom, it also helps to build his character as a more modern one. This could be interpreted by him stressing that he lives for his work, a common trait of a workaholic. Sherlock thus requires Moriarty as he provides new cases for him to solve, but Moriarty in return also needs Sherlock to solve cases for him as for example in 'The Scandal of Belgravia' where he uses Irene Adler to solve the key code. This interdependence between the hero and anti-hero blurs the lines of the good and the bad even more which feeds the struggle of Sherlock trying to do the good thing throughout the series.

Another relationship which is discussed at length by fan audiences is the one between Sherlock and Watson. Their relationship is indeed an important part of the characters' development in the Series. To begin with, the biggest difference between *Sherlock* and earlier adaptations when considering the outward appearances of both Watson and Holmes, is their overall groomed looks. As Benjamin Poore points out, their dress could be explained by stating they are both 'metrosexual' (10) men. Sherlock does indeed resemble a metrosexual man, to which Benedict Cumberbatch's own physical appearance adds that he looks very groomed. In a way, Sherlock does not seem to realize that his appearance is so appealing which adds to his attractiveness. Watson, on the other hand, looks much less polished, and has more in common with an ordinary man, which contradicts Poore's statement. As both characters are different in this point, another statement by Poore may be more interesting. Their close friendship may be explained with another contemporary concept, namely that of a 'bromance' (10). This interpretation is on the one hand very modern as it is a term used often in present-day society, but may on the other hand also be seen as the exact opposite as it rejects the possibility of a homosexual relationship altogether. The creators of *Sherlock* are

not explicit in their main character's sexual orientation but Watson is at least acting as if he is heterosexual as he dates women and even marries one. Still, their friendship is easily confused with a homosexual relationship as Mrs. Hudson does so at various points in the series. In all, the outward appearance of Sherlock is no real evidence for describing Sherlock and Watson's relationship as homosexual, and the hype has mainly been instigated by fans that tried to deduce hints about the characters' desire for each other from any detail they could find in the episodes.

Sherlock Holmes critic Bran Nicol and various characters in the series itself have argued that the 2010 Sherlock Holmes virtually impersonates a machine, or more precisely, a computer (Nicol 132) of which Holmes calls his brains his own 'hard drive' ('The Great Game'). The mind palace that Sherlock helps solve his cases is indeed in its size, speed and accessibility comparable to the way in which a hard drive functions. Sherlock Holmes' analytical manner of finding hints and clues also adds to this comparison while his 'science of deduction', or his particular way of doing his job, is not a new development. However, the comparison to a computer is a new addition and works very well in our twenty-first century setting. Not only is Sherlock's brain working like a machine, also his social skills are affected. Nicol even argues that emotions for Sherlock are what viruses are to computers; a 'threat' (134) to the functioning of the machine.

In all, the episodes have shown that the most important objective the creators had to keep in mind was to a certain extent retaining the original stories while keeping their additions relevant in the process of what Polasek calls 'contemporization' (390). Sherlock himself may seem a bit out of place in his own environment regarding his physical appearance and his social awkwardness. Nevertheless, one example that shows that at least his creators are very much aware of his surroundings as he first uses a Blackberry which he exchanges in due course for an I-phone. Sherlock is also seen using an Apple Mac, although this is Watson's laptop and not his own.

1.3 A (Post-)Modernist Approach

Many critics have underlined the postmodern characteristics of the series *Sherlock*. This section will investigate a few elements that are of importance in this thesis' context such as the invention of film and theories relating to Sherlock's mental state. The first films appeared not long after Conan Doyle got his Sherlock Holmes stories published. This resulted in many adaptations of the stories which show all the stages of development that the medium went through, from silent movies to television and online on-demand access. Strikingly, '[t]elevision, unlike architecture, literature, or painting never had a modernist phase that could serve as a point of departure for postmodern television' (Collins 330-331) which may ideally lead to insights into the relations of 'technology in temporary cultures' (327). The emergence of postmodernism is, therefore, "an uneven" development; its appearance and eventual impact vary from one medium to another' (331). Next to the postmodern interpretation of the medium of film and television as a whole, critics have also read postmodern elements into the series *Sherlock* itself.

The use of film was the most crucial transformation in adapting the tales of Conan Doyle as the medium was a very modern development and was introduced only a few years after the original Sherlock Holmes stories were published. Not only has the use of film made the detective stories even more alive centuries later, it has given its main character, Sherlock Holmes, a cult status. The art of film, therefore, has influenced the reaction of the audience on the stories in their original form. In his essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, cultural critic Walter Benjamin argues that art has always been reproducible, although some elements change when a replica is made. The development of the original Conan Doyle stories all the way up to the 2010 BBC series more than one hundred years later may indeed be described as one such replica as Benjamin describes it. Benjamin understands that the impact of film on the audience is so great that it 'capture[s] a place of its own among the artistic processes' (570). Moreover, the series *Sherlock* stretches beyond the characteristics of a replica as it has not only altered elements but also added several, of which the technological details are the most obvious.

Many adaptations of the stories have been produced since the invention of film, but one of the most recent series that was made by the BBC for the medium of television, has done so extremely successfully. The mass public, as described by Benjamin, was reached and their enthusiasm towards the original works of art by Conan Doyle has grown since the series' release. As Benjamin points out: '[e]ven the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be' (571). Indeed, 'the concept of authenticity' (571) is part of the analysis of a reproduction of the original, as new creators may have the original concept in mind when writing the adaptation, but can never fully grasp its meaning. Many elements play a role in this theory as not only the audiences change, but also their social rules and laws and technology advance. One characteristic of the BBC series which shows these abovementioned changes is its enormous amount of online content. As part of popular culture, Sherlock Holmes has given the audience a proactive reaction by creating fan clubs offline, but mainly online. The response of the masses is controlled very easily online which is, in turn, one of the reasons for the broad reach of the series.

Another reason for the series' success could be the fact that, according to Benjamin, 'the conventional is uncritically enjoyed' (571), which may give the BBC series, or any other adaptation really, a step ahead from other series and films. Not only was the character of Sherlock Holmes well known before the series aired, also the broadcasting network BBC already had a very prominent place in British culture. Still, it is not entirely clear whether the original works, the novels and stories, have also benefited from the success of the series as the adaptation does not only have similarities but obviously also differs from the original. Therefore, one may state that the tradition of Sherlock Holmes has changed so greatly that the BBC series *Sherlock* has become a separate, though derivative element of modern culture, which although it benefits from the well-known institutions of Sherlock Holmes and the BBC, is also successful individually.

In his essay, Bran Nicol argues that the Sherlock Holmes created by the series' writers is in fact 'the symptom of the postmodern age of production' (134). There are indeed various

instances in the series that underline his statement. One such element is found in Sherlock's character and relates to his lack of emotions. As mentioned before in section 1.2, this is most prominently seen at moments when Sherlock reacts inappropriately enthusiastic when he is working on cases and bystanders show their revolt of his reactions. According to Fredric Jameson, the world of crime narratives in postmodernity is indeed one in which the 'waning of affect' occurs repeatedly (61). As Bran Nicol explains, Sherlock shows signs of 'postmodern sensibility' (138) which is most prominently found in his mood swings. When Sherlock is not working on a case, his mind is not challenged and he seeks distraction in other activities such as using drugs.

Apart from the development of the original works into the BBC series, the individual character of Sherlock as created by Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat may also be investigated with a modernist approach in mind. The main problem that Sherlock encounters when doing his job is that he cannot restrain himself from being enthusiastic about horrible facts and his ability to deduce the missing links in the cases. The works of one of the most influential psychoanalysts of the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud, may usefully be brought in here. His definition of 'epistemophilia', or 'the satisfaction derived from reaching the conclusion of a line of thought' (124) may be used to describe Holmes' unorthodox reaction when he is deducing and solving a case. The term also includes that the experience is so intense that it may be felt as 'a sexual satisfaction' (124), which in turn would make up for the rather unromantic life he is living. This explanation could satisfy the void that Sherlock leaves with the twenty-first century audience's understanding of the character, who is at times rather difficult to relate to.

1.4 Conclusion

In all, the history of Sherlock Holmes' afterlife is extensive and knows many adaptations and changes. The original character of Holmes is rather difficult to trace back in *Sherlock*, but following the reactions on earlier adaptations of its creator Conan Doyle, an estimated ideal version of Holmes may be identified. Other variants of the character will be discussed

hereafter in Chapter 2 but from the character analysis in this chapter, it has already become evident that the BBC adaptation is unique in its approach when compared with earlier adaptations of the Holmes stories. To trace back where its popularity comes from, we have to understand the adaptation's place in history. The invention of film has provided a medium in which the stories can be retold many times. Benjamin's theory of art in the age of mechanical reproduction has in turn shown us the importance of tracing back the impact of film, or in this case of television, on its public. Also his explanation of the difference between authenticity and the creators' objective but eventual inability to stick to the original works adds to our understanding to what extent *Sherlock* may be seen as a successful adaptation of the original works of Conan Doyle. The influence of post-modernity accounts for the characteristic of the method of working that is so typical of Sherlock Holmes as a detective. In order to give a thorough understanding of the series' influence, chapter two and three will investigate the BBC's history and objective and the series' influence and impact on the present-day audience..

Chapter 2: The BBC Series Sherlock

2.1 Introduction

On 25 July 2010, the BBC aired the first episode of *Sherlock* a series which has developed into three series, each consisting of three episodes. Each episode explores and solves one particular case while at the same time other events link up the stories and form the series arc. The main characters of the series, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. John Watson, are played by Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman, two British actors with many other successful films and series on their résumé. Also the series' creators, Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat, have a broad experience in producing television. First coming to the public's attention as part of *The League of Gentlemen* (1999-2002), Gatiss is a comedian and novelist who also plays the part of Mycroft Holmes, Sherlock's brother. He has also scripted several episodes of *Dr. Who* (2005-present), as well as a version of M.R. James's *The Tractate Middoth* (2013), among other works. Before his work on *Sherlock*, Moffat was known for his work on the comedy series *Coupling* (2000-2004) and more recently, as a writer and later showrunner on the televised *Dr. Who*. Both men have their roots in comedy, and comic elements play a large part in *Sherlock* as well. The series have attracted casual viewers but also fans of the original tales who have obviously compared these two next to earlier adaptations. The difference between these two kinds of viewers is accommodated for by the creators who have added in-jokes and references to the original stories.

One critic, Ashley Polasek, puts the series in context aligned to other twenty-first century adaptations such as the Guy Ritchie movies and the FOX series *House*. Although this thesis focuses on *Sherlock*, her work may add to understanding what adaptations may lead to. According to Linda Hutcheon, an adaptation is 'an announced and extensive transposition of a particular work or works' (7). As the BBC series also differ from the original stories, the comparison of the two and other adaptations will be conducted with this definition in mind.

2.2 The BBC Series

The British Broadcasting Corporation has been a national institution from the 1920s onwards, making it the oldest public broadcasting corporation worldwide. It functions as a deep-rooted and respected institution both in the United Kingdom as well as abroad. Like many long-standing institutions, the BBC has had to deal with ‘shifting social needs, cultural tastes, and more pragmatic imperatives’ (Blumler 330) which have doubtlessly influenced its choices regarding the programmes it makes. As Jay Blumler already described, series like *Sherlock* were produced in times in which ‘[p]ressures of change on British broadcasting [were] [...] far-reaching, challenging, and continuous’ (Blumler 330). One element which always needs to be fulfilled is the ideal of public service, which however was ‘nowhere explicitly defined’ (330) but may be explained in terms of ‘programming range, quality and popularity’ (330). Lord Reith was the instigator of this concept of public service, as he declared at a meeting with the general manager of the BBC that he was of opinion ‘that broadcasting should be conducted as a public service’ (ODNB). As he was then a very young chief executive and the BBC was a commercial enterprise it was a bold statement, but he was also very successful because of it. Indeed, the change ‘did not happen immediately [but] in 1926 the BBC turned into a public corporation’ (ODNB). Reith then became BBC’s first director-general and was even honoured with a knighthood.

The emphasis here lies on the ‘general viewing audience’ (Blumler 330) a concepts that prohibits programmes and series being targeted at a particular audience. In *Sherlock* these criteria are met as the series have not only satisfied earlier fans of the Sherlock Holmes stories but also created an audience which was not that familiar with the character and his cases. Still, there are various examples to be found on television today of shows that are indeed very specialized in terms of subject-matter and are clearly aimed at a niche audience. The strength of *Sherlock* is, therefore, even more remarkable as it seems there is hardly any gender or age exclusion in the fan audience.

As Jay Blumler concludes in his *Encyclopedia of Television*, British television has ‘been extensively revamped since the 1980s’ (336). Still, what he could not have predicted

back in 2004 was the ongoing or rather intensifying of the influence of new technologies. The most explicit statement from his conclusion, which is applicable to the present-day situation, is that British broadcasting was ‘becoming less closely regulated than it used to be’ (Blumler 336). The main evidence for this development is that the *Sherlock* series can be watched online, both on websites of the BBC and on pay-to-view online services. The BBC is thus ‘straining to be its past self’ (336) but also adding extra online services on their website which it probably is required to do in order to survive in our present-day online-oriented society. Nevertheless, the technological advances have caused a modification in executing the network’s programmes and has widened its scope. The accessibility has grown immensely by offering the BBC series on paid platforms such as Netflix. The quality of Netflix has convinced a great number of people worldwide to subscribe, which gave them access to an online video library. An estimated 61.4 million people are currently subscribers to Netflix (Gensler).

Regarding Holmes, many literary adaptations have appeared since Arthur Conan Doyle created the original stories in 1889. However, it was not until 1951 when ‘[t]he first television series of the Sherlock Holmes adventures was produced in the United Kingdom by Vandyke Pictures’ (Gibberman IV 2080). Unfortunately, the pilot of this series was not successful and only one episode was broadcast. Already a few months later ‘the British Broadcasting Company aired its own pilot’ (2080) and by the end of 1951 the BBC produced the first complete television series of Sherlock Holmes adventures. Apparently this version was successful and ‘[t]he BBC continued to produce series of Holmes adventures’ (2080). A 1965 series of 12 adaptations was produced by David Goddard which attracted 11 million viewers. As noted by *The Times*, the sleuth played by Douglas Wilmer ‘bore an “uncanny resemblance”’ (2080) to the original Holmes. It probably meant that the actor looked a lot like the image that the audience had of Holmes, an image that was created in large part by Sidney Paget who drew illustrations for *The Strand* magazine, in which the first Conan Doyle stories were published. It was not until 1998 that ‘BBC Radio became the first production company to complete dramatizations of all 60 Sherlock Holmes adventures’ (2081).

There were of course also many other actors that played the role of Sherlock Holmes and were applauded for their work during their own time of whom a few will be named here to illustrate the background material of *Sherlock's* producers. In the 1930s and 1940s, Basil Rathbone was one of the most famous impersonators of Sherlock Holmes, in a series of films that began with his performance of Sherlock Holmes in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1938). This version was very successful which led to a sequel, *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1939). After a three-year pause, another 'twelve films followed in five years' (ODNB). The adaptations bore increasingly less resemblance to the original Doyle stories as they used historically significant elements such as the Nazis. The first true Sherlock Holmes for the televised generation was Peter Cushing who showed yet another side of the Sherlock Holmes character in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1959) and, through his work for Hammer Studios, he was the unmistakable horror actor of his time. The Sherlock Holmes of the late 1960s was played by Robert Stephens in Billy Wilder's *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* (1969), a film-adaptation that was even further removed from the original stories as it included such implausible figures as a troupe of dwarfs and the Loch Ness monster. By that time Stephens was experiencing 'glorious success' (ODNB) particularly in the London theatre and was, for example, the star performer in *The Royal Hunt of the Sun* (1964). Jeremy Brett played the leading role in the series *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* from 1984 to 1994. In the 2004 TV film-adaptation *Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the Silk Stocking*, Rupert Everett played a queer version of the Sherlock Holmes character. In the latest adaptation *Elementary* (2012 - 2015), Jonny Lee Miller plays Holmes and Lucy Liu is the first female version of Watson.

Although the BBC was the initiator of the 2010 series, ultimately the creators were in control of its contents. Their intentions are known to us through various interviews they have given as a result of its success. In essence, Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss wanted to create an adaptation that might also have worked for its original creator Arthur Conan Doyle. In order to achieve this resemblance, they based their stories greatly on the acting of Eille Norwood. British actor Eille Norwood has played Sherlock in no less than forty-seven silent films, and

as mentioned already in section 1.1, and underlined by Brian McFarlane, he ‘was praised by Doyle for “his wonderful impersonation of Holmes”’ (700). Indeed, Conan Doyle thought ‘[h]e ha[d] that rare quality which c[ould] only be described as glamour’ (562). Although ‘[e]very generation has produced its definitive Sherlock Holmes’ (700), Eille Norwood is identified as one of the best impersonators of the character of all time. By creating the 2010 character of Sherlock Holmes, Gatiss and Moffat gave our generation’s Benedict Cumberbatch as the true Holmes impersonator. As Moffat and Gatiss explain in the documentary *Unlocking Sherlock* (2014), they tried to use elements from the Eille Norwood adaptations in the 2010 *Sherlock* series. Creator Steven Moffat knew exactly what he wanted to achieve with his television adaptation of the original stories as he states on the BBC site that the series is ‘about brilliant detection, dreadful villains and blood-curling crimes’. He got rid of the details that were added by later adaptations as ‘Conan Doyle’s stories were never about frock coats and gas light’ (BBC site). The real difference between the Sherlock Holmes tales and other detective is in his opinion simple: ‘[o]ther detectives have cases, Sherlock Holmes has adventures, and that’s what matters’ (BBC site).

2.3 Updated Cases

The BBC series *Sherlock* were produced nearly 130 years after Arthur Conan Doyle published his first novel, and the adaptations that were made throughout these years have redefined the stories tremendously. The producers of the BBC series have had the difficult task of recreating an adaptation that would appeal a twenty-first century audience. Although the number of adaptations on Sherlock Holmes is enormous, the demand for new stories is still present as many new variants of the stories are repeatedly very popular. As shown above, Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat had a strong vision of what their version of the Sherlock Holmes stories should be. Moffat pointed out to Ashley Polasek: ‘There is a tendency, perhaps because it is a period piece, to treat it like holy writ and that can sometimes suffocate the voice of the author who didn’t regard it that way at all’ (390). The series have thus proven to be a one of a kind adaptation containing many sensible details as will be discussed in detail

hereafter.

Obviously, at times when technology is woven into our daily lives as greatly as it is now, it is no surprise that creators Moffat and Gatiss have integrated all kinds of modern gadgets in their stories. The integrating of technological elements is done very successfully as the audience is really absorbed into the series as they are invited to help solve the cases. This starts in the first episode already as hints are projected on the screen, so that the audience is actively included in the search for the solution to the cases. This actually makes the stories more realistic as the more unlikely facts are explained and it seems as if an ordinary observant person is nonetheless just not trained enough to see what Sherlock deduces. The 2010 series is not only updated with technological advances but also had to have a different set of standards to satisfy the twenty-first-century's audience needs. As Poore explains, the 'Victorian audience [...] expected and thrived on melodrama' (3) while, according to Ira Hauptmann, the modern audience need a 'realism's' morality' (283). The methods of deduction employed by Sherlock in the BBC series have not changed that much from the original that were based on the techniques of Joseph Bell. The fact that his science of deduction has become Sherlock's trademark and that Joseph Bell's work was already quite modern for his times, makes it not very surprising that the creators preserved this element of the original stories intact.

The first Episode of Season One, called 'A Study in Pink', introduces the main characters in such a way that any missing pieces, or parts of their characters that do not fit into our society today, are taken care of. For instance Dr. Watson has just come back from the twentieth-century war in Afghanistan, which parallels with the original stories. The series may thus be seen as a continuation of the original, rather than a contradiction. Watson is seeing a psychiatrist for his post-traumatic stress and is encouraged to write a blog about his experiences as a soldier to overcome his fears. Eventually Watson writes about the cases as a way of dealing with his violent past. After Sherlock has dragged Watson to his first case, he shows how he deduces information, based on Watson's mobile phone. One of the clues the phone gives him are the scratches which implicates that the phone has been used a lot while

it is a new version. Sherlock thus concludes that it must have been a present from someone with the initials like the ones that are etched on its back. This scene is based on the original stories by Conan Doyle in which Sherlock shows his deduction skills by using almost the same hints and clues albeit from a technological gadget of that time, a watch.

Sherlock's own website called *The Science of Deduction* is introduced as well, but is projected as something ridiculous as it covers forty-three variants of tobacco ash, which implies that Sherlock does not add any interesting information to the Internet. This might even hint at the fact that Sherlock does not see the importance of using the digital world at all, although this is also contradicted by his solving of this particular case. More evidence for the importance of technology and his awareness of its importance is found in Sherlock checking the weather forecast on his mobile phone in order to help him solve the case in 'A Study in Pink'. In contrast, Sherlock's brother uses both modern and typically London elements as he tries to communicate with Watson by using the old-fashioned telephone boxes he is passing while at the same time watching him using modern CVC cameras.

In the second Episode of Season Two, 'The Blind Banker', the modern technologically advanced world Sherlock and John live in is challenged by a historic world of codes. Holmes easily conducts that every element in their daily life is computer generated, from the computerised cashier at the supermarket to getting money from the ATM. Still, he also remarks that this case is different. This episode proves that Sherlock is indeed very good at deciphering computerised codes, as he easily hacks John's laptop, but has difficulties with a historical and to him unknown Chinese code. As Sherlock is solving his case, he even grumbles over the fact that 'they used a code, why not use e-mail' (15:34). What is of most interest here to this thesis is that reference is made to Sherlock being like a machine, albeit by using the image of a chip and PIN machine. In this scene, Sherlock finds it very odd that John is so angry with the computerised cashier and he exclaims, 'You had a row with a machine?' (5:37). In fact this is indeed very likely as John is arguing with Sherlock, the personified machine, at that very moment. Details of technologies of the twenty-first century are once more included in this episode through details as the video surveillance, the flaw in

the automatic security system of a bank and using photographs on Sherlock's mobile phone as part of solving this case.

In Episode Three of Season Two, 'The Great Game', there are not many noticeable elements of technology but there are instances of daily current social influences such as the need to pay the bills which makes the main characters more human. Still, car noises seem to be very prominent as well as the city of London. One remarkable scene is found when Sherlock is showing his only physical exercise which he is performing on his rowing machine. As he is not the typically sporty type he probably just uses his rowing machine only to pass time. Furthermore, he is again making photographs of the crime-scenes with his Blackberry, and the series' arc of codes and electronic deciphering reoccurs as well.

In Episode One of Season Two, 'A Scandal in Belgravia', many important aspects of the *Sherlock* character of Sherlock Holmes are revealed. In the first place, the emphasis lies on his online identity but also on his love life. In this episode, Sherlock is repeatedly put forward as a public figure, starting with a bunch of journalists awaiting him outside a crime-scene. Holmes does not believe they are indeed interested in him and Watson, but as Inspector Lestrade points out: 'That was before [he] became an internet phenomenon' (7:37). Quite cleverly, the series' writers have here found a way of alluding to one element of Sherlock's typical dress, the deerstalker that remained part of his image since actor Basil Rathbone played the part; Sherlock grabs the hat from a dressing room as he and Watson leave a crime scene. As they leave the building, Inspector Lestrade speaks very positively about the attention, stating that '[i]t's good for the public image' (7:47) by which he probably means the image of the police. Sherlock responds by saying: 'I'm a private-detective, the last thing I need is a public image' (7:49). Immediately following that moment, the newspaper headings state: 'Hatman and Robin. The Web Detectives', 'Sherlock Net 'Tec'', 'Sherlock and John Blogger Detectives' and 'Sherlock Holmes: Net Phenomenon'. Some elements of technological advances are, however, even for a twenty-first century audience a bit too far reached. Particularly the scene in which John visits the murder scene in the meadows has a few implausible parts. As he find himself in the middle of nature, it is rather odd that John

asks for Wi-Fi. Apparently there is indeed an internet connection available as he uses Skype to communicate the details of the case with Sherlock who is still in London. John is then summoned back to the City to which he travels by helicopter, which is in itself not an extraordinary way of travelling, but it is when used for a mere colleague of an amateur detective.

In Episode Two of Season Two, called ‘The Hound of Baskervilles’, the subject of experiments with biological weapons and genetic mutations is prominent. The parallel to the death of Sherlock Holmes in the original stories is interesting as Sherlock is standing on top of a bunch of rocks as if standing on the cliff at various moments in the episode. This was indeed the setting, albeit in a different country during a different case, that he was murdered in, in the original stories. The significance of social media is addressed in this episode as well as there is only one mention of the hound on Twitter, which is so little that it immediately becomes suspicious. The chemical minefield with its fogs has a very sinister feel and influences the entire episode as it becomes a story about unveiling the secrets of the town. In this episode, Sherlock also uses his mind vault, a place in his memory which might be compared to the hard drive of a computer. The influence of the media is shown through a TV-interview, for which Watson calls Sherlock a show-off as Sherlock. His addictive state is shown through him sniffing cigarette smoke and a reference to the film *Thank you for Smoking*.

The opening scene of the third Episode of Season Two called ‘The Reichenbach Fall’, is set at Watson’s psychologist 18 months after Sherlock died. Watson introduces the starting point of this new series with the words ‘[m]y best friend, Sherlock Holmes, is dead’ (1:30). Some drastic events are about to unfold in this episode of which the following scene travels back in time 18 months. The first important theme that is discussed is fame and identity which is mainly constructed by the media. Obviously the audience of the series already know Sherlock Holmes as a literary phenomenon, but for the public in the series there never has been such a literary character. Interestingly, Sherlock’s tabloid nickname is ‘boffin’ (3:23) while Watson is referred to as ‘bachelor John Watson’ (3:33). Watson again stresses that

Sherlock's character is formed by his identity as shaped by the media. Particularly his hat is not a simple deerstalker anymore, but 'it's a Sherlock Holmes-hat' (3:40). Sherlock himself does not seem to understand what all this attention could lead to as he tells Watson: 'It really bothers you. I don't understand. Why would it bother you?' (4:04). Watson does indeed understand the dangers and foreshadows Sherlock's eventual setback as he points out that 'the press will turn, they always do' (3:59). Watson thus accuses the media, and not Moriarty, of being responsible for Sherlock's downfall. This is the beginning of the media circus for Sherlock as his name is constantly used in articles about Moriarty as we see from various newspaper clippings describing him as the 'expert witness' (10:26). Here, Sherlock is still seen as the 'Reichenbach hero' (12:15). Sherlock himself is very clear in his opinion about journalists and the media as becomes evident in the next scene where he is approached by a female journalist disguised as a fan. When she asks him about his alleged homosexual relationship with Watson he tells her that she repels him. The journalist again underlines the importance of the media in creating Sherlock's identity and employment by stating: 'You need me, or you're nothing' (22:55). Moriarty quite cleverly deconstructs Sherlock's identity by for instance manipulating Watson's soft spot. He plays a freaky children's story-teller on the TV that Watson watches in a cab who tells a story about 'Sir boast-a-lot' (46:16), a reference to Sherlock's arrogant performance at court which irritated Watson.

The second element that is important for investigating this episode, is the use of technological devices. While Moriarty cracks the codes to several major institutions in London, Sherlock is ignorant about the buzzing of his phone and thus misses the commotion. This scene again underlines Sherlock's lack of social interaction as he is not used to getting text messages. Watson is eventually the one who is showing him what crucial information the messages hold. Sherlock's attention is eventually caught when Watson announces that '[h]e is back' (9:50). In this episode, Moriarty claims to possess the 'key code', a series of numbers that would reveal all the world's secrets. The code was also used to open the vault of The Bank of England, to open the cells at Pentonville Prison and to break into the security system of The Tower of London. The code is crucial and Sherlock states that 'he [Moriarty ed.] has

got the ultimate weapon: the key code' (1:04:44). Another technological aspect in this episode is the Wi-Fi network, or 'a surveillance network that is closing in on us' (48:44), of all the murderers who are watching Sherlock. These villains are all looking for the key code which Sherlock is said to possess, but in the end he takes it with him to the grave.

'The Empty Hearse', the first Episode of Season Three, is much debated about both on-screen as well as online as it hints at various possible ways in which Sherlock has staged his own death. However, the true cause of Sherlock's death in the previous episode is still not given. Unlike the original stories, Sherlock dies a very different death as he seemingly commits suicide. As Benedict Cumberbatch explained in the documentary *Unlocking Sherlock* the scene of the character's death is 'a confession of failure' (2:45) and to Watson and the audience 'it's basically saying step away from who you thought I once was because I am not [that]' (2:47-51). As mentioned above, this has unleashed a wave of speculation online as will be discussed further in section 3.2.

'The Sign of Three', the second Episode of Season Three, starts with a robbery where hacking is used as the police misleads the robbers and catches them by hacking their system in return. This scene is apparently only there to show that the police can indeed be successful without Sherlock and that he is an obstacle for the professionals at times. In this episode, Holmes is preparing for Watson's and Mary's wedding and as part of his preparations he has learned to fold napkins on Youtube (30:30). John and Sherlock are manipulated by Mary in taking each other out on a new case. Watson is using the argument that his 'inbox is bursting' (32:03) and that they should be going back to work together. In this episode, Sherlock is presented as a humane character who could, albeit for a short time, live without his cases and needs his friend Dr. Watson, a welcome divergence from the highly technologically advanced previous episode.

The last Episode of Season Three, 'His Last Vow', is luckily for the audience not the end of the *Sherlock* series. But with that fact in mind, the episode might be a little less exciting as well. Sherlock's addiction to drugs is an interesting turn in the story, as it is discussed at length. Sherlock claims that he has been working on a case at a crack house but

he has definitely been using drugs as well, as Molly detects from his urine sample in her lab. In contrast to the original stories, it is not entirely clear what kind of drugs he uses, but he is definitely scolded by Dr. Watson and Molly for using it.

The appraisal of modern technology as we have spotted in earlier episodes is somewhat downgraded again in favour of the mind and actual physical bullying by Mr. Charles August Magnussen. Magnussen's mansion Appledore is the main element which underlines the prominence of the mind instead of technology, as the myth of the vaults is crushed when Sherlock and Watson find out no such thing exists. As we might have predicted from 'The Reichenbach Fall', computers can be hacked and that is the reason why Magnussen works with a 'mind palace', just as Sherlock does. Sherlock is in this episode partly blinded by technology as he is convinced that Magnussen wears glasses that show him all the information on a particular person when he looks at them. This is not the case, but Magnussen still has the computer-like image in his vision as if it is projected on his lenses or present within the mind itself so the audience is kept wondering what the truth really is. When Sherlock is being sent away for murdering Magnussen the unthinkable happens; Moriarty sends a computerised image of himself to every television screen in the country asking: 'Did you miss me?' (1:27:12). Apparently, Sherlock was not the only one that could rise from the dead, but we will find out what really happens next in 2016 when season four airs.

In *Sherlock*, more modern developments like the use of computers and hacking are reoccurring symbols of terrorism. Although both adaptations use traditional weapons like bombs and guns, the BBC series do not feel as violent as the Guy Ritchie movies. Even though Moriarty has a widely-spread network of terrorists that control the world and still has a rather high death count on his account, he is so powerful because of the use of computerised codes and hacking. Sherlock's style of work is what sets the two characters apart as his way of using his powers is much more based on the original stories in which the power of the mind always conquers that of physical violence. Indeed, the attacks that are most successful, are the ones based on the use of computerised codes and hacking.

In all, the technological advances of the present-day or even of the future that are represented in various ways in *Sherlock*, are to a great extent responsible for what the series have become. The struggle between the real and surreal may add to the series' popularity. However, the non-existence of, for instance, the key code, the hound and the intelligent glasses, results in an anti-climactic experience. Still, because these high-tech inventions do not exist in real life either, the series also becomes much more plausible while at the same time keeping the audience eager for more.

2.4 Updated Themes and Characters

The revived and newly found characters of the 2010 series *Sherlock* all play their significant part in making the series what it has become. Next to the technological advances that were made, the characters were also given a make-over in order to fit in the twenty-first century world. Some adjustments may be harder to spot than others, but this is maybe so because they were done rather convincingly. In any case, the social life of Sherlock Holmes has broadened causing his professional and his private life to intertwine at many levels. Still, this does not mean that his life has become any easier as his social skills are rather underdeveloped, a lack which leads to awkward situations for himself, but also underlines the key strength of the series, namely its comic basis.

Next to the series hero, as investigated in section 1.2, Dr. Watson is the second most important character. Before *Sherlock*, Martin Freeman was known to the larger audience from his performances in *The Office* (2001-2003), *Love Actually* (2003), *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* (2005) and *The Hobbit* (2012), and is considered to be 'one of the most engaging personalities to have emerged in the new century' (McFarlane 270). But also in *Sherlock* he has re-invented himself in the character of Dr. Watson, or, as Brian McFarlane puts it: 'Films should be grateful he gave up squash, an earlier ambition, for acting, and in the *Sherlock* series he was a superb Dr. Watson' (271). There are indeed many ways in which the reinvented Dr. Watson adds to the stories as he has never done before. His character is prominently part of the stories and extends beyond his role of mere storyteller.

Martin Freeman's version of Dr. Watson is actually the main character that adds to the series' plausibility. His sceptical mind-set makes any extraordinary element that occurs in the episodes plausible by embodying the doubts the audience might have on seemingly impossible situations. One such example is found in the first episode already in which Dr. Watson and Sherlock meet for the first time. Here, the first instance of Sherlock's method of deduction is demonstrated by his almost flawless description of Watson's past. The introduction of the two characters is rather intense as Sherlock immediately deduces Watson's background by little hints and clues on his person. Watson is overwhelmed but also intrigued by the figure of Sherlock and does not dismiss the idea of sharing a room together immediately but does look him up on Google when he gets home. Sherlock eventually explains how he deciphered his background, as shown in section 2.3, and this is not only satisfying for Watson himself but also for the audience. The scene is not only a means to keeping the story realistic but also a fundamental element for gaining constant audience credence.

In fact, Watson really is the adult character that Sherlock needs to protect him from himself. Polasek therefore calls him the 'emotional mediator' (390) of the series as he constantly tries to rescue Sherlock from awkward social situations. As Watson points out in 'A Scandal in Belgravia', his blog is Sherlock's living as it functions as the true source where his clients may contact the consulting detective. Watson chronicles the stories on his blog thus making sure that the audience is reached and Sherlock's popularity grows. All these elements are the typical job for a present-day personal assistant one might argue, albeit that the original stories were similarly imagined to have been written down by Watson.

Another character which has become much more prominent in the BBC series is Mrs. Hudson who has a similar role as Dr. Watson regarding the series' realism. At times, Mrs. Hudson expresses the horror and repulsion that the audience might possibly experience in situations such as finding human thumbs in the refrigerator. She is also the most prominent character who repeatedly wonders about what kind of relationship Watson and Sherlock have. The theme of the possible existence of a homosexual relationship between Watson and

Holmes is indeed hinted at several times. The first time this occurs is when, upon meeting the two men for the first time, Mrs. Hudson points out there is a second bedroom available but only 'if [they are] needing two bedrooms' (14:30).

Apart from Mrs. Hudson, women do not play a very prominent role in the private life of Sherlock Holmes. Still, there are two romantic storylines in the series which is already two more than in the original stories. The most important result of this improvement is the added humane element of the character of Sherlock. Another effect of these female characters is comic-relief, as humorous instances are often a result of scenes in which Sherlock converses with women. His first one-sided love interest is lab assistant Molly who wholeheartedly helps Sherlock whenever he needs her lab for solving cases. At a certain point, she asks him whether he would like to drink some coffee, obviously trying to ask him out which only results in Sherlock presuming she is going to get him a coffee to which he answers that he would like two sugars. In 'The Reichenbach Falls' Molly makes a second attempt by telling Sherlock he can always count on her and uses the rather unfortunate phrase 'you can use me' (38:40). Again, Sherlock's limited social skills prevent him from reaching out to Molly in reciprocation. Still, Molly is the one person who helps him out greatly thus showing her significance to the plot. For instance when Sherlock stages his own death, one possible variant of how he has survived shows them being intimate for a few seconds after he crashes through the window of Molly's lab.

Sherlock's second romantic interest, Irene Adler, is introduced in 'A Scandal in Belgravia'. Romance plays an obvious role in this episode; the character of Irene Adler is the most convincing argument for Sherlock being a conventional heterosexual. According to Lyn Thomas, Irene expresses herself in terms of a 'sexually predatory element' (6), in strong contrast to Molly who represents true 'romantic yearning' (6). A sexual tension is felt throughout the entire episode which reaches its climax in the scene in which Sherlock finally succeeds in unlocking her phone, the most important element in her life. This may be read as a symbolic sex act as Irene Adler's love for Sherlock is eventually key to this episode's case; the correct code to her mobile phone is 'I am Sherlocked'.

Irene Adler may be seen as the only female character who takes a stance for her femininity. Still, she does that by using her sexuality against men which in turn could be read as a negative image. Still, she is so much more than an object of desire, which strengthens the series' concealed feminist message. Sherlock not only deciphers her code, but is also vulnerable in relation to her as he cannot stop himself from having feelings for her. Sherlock's love life contrasts with Watson's marriage to Mary Morstan. In addition to the abovementioned relationships with women, Sherlock also pretends to have a relationship with a bridesmaid he knows from John and Mary's wedding. However, this relationship only works as a cover-up in order to get access to Magnussen's office.

The only characters that remain solely part of Sherlock's professional life are the police officers who are not too fond of Holmes interfering in their cases. In particular, Sergeant Sally Donovan repeatedly refers to Sherlock as the freak and, as mentioned before, advises Dr. Watson to keep away from him. Even though the presence of an amateur detective causes trouble for him, Detective Inspector Greg Lestrade needs Sherlock to solve his cases. Over all, Sherlock practically ignores the work of the police force and corrects their mistakes in reasoning. During the press conference in 'A Study in Pink', Sherlock text messages the word 'WRONG' to all present journalists every time Lestrade reveals evidence in the case that is apparently false. By underlining the incapability of the police force in contrast to Sherlock's successes, the series have formed Sherlock's identity as the hero and thus most prominent character of the series.

2.5 Conclusion

In all, while the success of the 2010 BBC series *Sherlock* can be put down to various factors, it is perhaps most admirable for its combination of the digital world with Conan Doyle's presentation of the detective techniques and Holmes' character. The objectives of creators Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat were based on creating an adaptation that would stay very true to the original stories by Arthur Conan Doyle, next to bringing the cases and characters into the twenty-first century. But by combining the best of both worlds, taking the original

stories as a starting point and adding present-day elements to the storyline, the creators were successful in, once again, attracting a very active fan audience for the Sherlock Holmes stories, as will be investigated in chapter three. Also the roles of the characters have changed to such an extent that on the one hand they have stayed true to Conan Doyle's original versions, while at the same time they were being influenced by the creators of the generations. What becomes most evident here, is that the role of Sherlock Holmes is still very prominent, while at the same time his social life is broadened by giving other characters more influence.

Chapter 3: A Twenty-First Century Fan Base

3.1 Introduction

The 2010 series *Sherlock* is easily accessible through Netflix, one of the most successful developments in watching online on-demand series and films of the past couple of years. The international audience is mainly reached via this online platform and particularly British viewers are encouraged to pursue their *Sherlock* interest on the BBC website. The BBC website has many features to accommodate for the demand for more *Sherlock*. There are interactive trailers with exclusive clips from series three, a version of John Watson's blog, photo galleries, video interviews with the cast and creators, an extra mini-episode, a clip made by BBC Four on how to be Sherlock Holmes, a puzzle with hidden messages to test your own powers of deduction and help Sherlock Holmes decipher Season 1, a TV blog by Mark Gatiss, a live Q&A with the actors, and much more. Still, the online fan base does not stop at the extra features that are provided by the creators and the BBC. Social media play an even bigger role in the spread of the series' popularity which is very much in line with the 'oral popular culture' (Fiske 319) which is part of present-day online behaviour.

Of course there are also certain offline indicators of the series' success. Several award nominations and wins represent the approval of the professional film industry. Next to that, the fact that a new series is going to be released in 2016 shows that the audience, but also the creators, cannot get enough of *Sherlock*. There are indeed rather influential differences between the offline and online fan communities which also need to be addressed. A qualitative audience investigation is executed here by combining both fan opinions from offline and online sources and expert voices. Next to that, these opinions are put into perspective by my own reading of the series. With the earlier conclusions in mind, it will thus be investigated to what extent *Sherlock* is part of contemporary British culture and how much of its success was generated by both the BBC and the fan audiences themselves.

3.2 Reception of the Adaption

According to the online IMDb database, *Sherlock* scores an average 9.3 out of 10 as scored by 365.815 users. As the database is a widely respected source for movies and series it should, therefore, be taken seriously but it must also be remembered that the users may have varying understandings of quality television. Next to that, the professional world of television have awarded the series with nomination and wins including BAFTAs, BAFTA Cymru awards and an Emmy nomination. In all, the series have collected one Golden Globe nomination, won 66 awards and has nominated for another 100 prizes. But apart from the professional approval, the fan audience has also shown its dedication to the series through various media.

Like the cynical character Anderson, a member of the police force with DI Lestrade but foremost a Sherlock critic, some fans tend to become obsessed by the theories of how Sherlock died in Episode Two, Season Three. The first Episode of Season Three already gives a few options which are underlined with visual evidence but what really happened with Moriarty and Sherlock during the rooftop scene does not become entirely clear. Anderson himself parallels the late nineteenth-century audience that demanded Conan Doyle should resurrect Sherlock from the dead, as he is convinced that Sherlock still has to be alive. This discussion is subject to many online fan communities as well, but on platforms like these there is also an enormous amount of information to be found on the reception of the BBC adaptation as such.

In many ways, *Sherlock* may be compared to the 1980s popular series *Morse*, which is obviously also an English detective story but is more interesting as a comparison here because of its status as quality television. The gender representation in the *Sherlock*'s audience is not as extreme as in the romantic *Morse* series as there are little instances of romantic narratives. As this is a typical development of the twenty-first century, one could use the term 'post-feminist' as Lyn Thomas does 'to describe changes in the [...] audiences of contemporary popular culture' (2). *Sherlock* does not belong to a 'women's' genre' (5) as the audience does not only consist of the typical screaming female fans, although there are of course some of that type. As with *Morse*, *Sherlock* only has a few female characters and

female individuals with the production team. This may also indicate that the producers chose to have a broader focus in order for the series to attract a more diverse audience.

According to Fiske, one methodological strategy of cultural studies ‘derives from ethnography’ (305), an approach that helps with the study of the meaning of fan expressions. One element of this strategy, which is reading comments on fan pages, is used for this investigation in particular. Alongside this investigation, an analysis of social media use and *Sherlock*’s online identity is also provided for in section 3.3. It has to be taken into account that in this context meanings ‘are relative and change according to historical and social conditions’ (Fiske 305) and thus need to be seen in the light of twenty-first-century British society, hence the focus on online fan environments. Also offline fan bases still exist such as The Baker Street Irregulars that have been around since 1934. The Sherlock Holmes Society of London was founded in 1951 but when the *Sherlock* series came out the amount of viewers and subscribers soared. Apart from this interesting fact, the offline platforms will not be part of this investigation, as the focus lies on online communities, social media use and other online components.

The online fans of the BBC series are mainly found on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Next to that, these fans also voice their opinions on separate fan sites and in comment boxes on sites like IMDb. A source which shows and tells the direct responses on the series’ popularity are clips of video’s found on Youtube, which are an example of the active fan response towards the series. The most important source for giving an understanding of the reception of the 2010 BBC adaptation is indeed found on Youtube, namely a video of *The Great Holmes Debate*.

In 2011, a focus group-like investigation, called *The Great Sherlock Holmes Debate* was held in London. It compared the latest Sherlock Holmes adaptations as produced by the BBC and Warner Bros. The debate was accessible online and its audience could vote twice for the best adaptation of the original tale: before the debate was aired and after they had heard the evidence as provided by the Holmes scholars, members of Sherlock Holmes societies, and webmasters of fan sites. These so-called ‘Holmes experts’ debated ‘on what the current

productions of the Holmes name contributed to the Legacy of Sherlock Holmes' (Foad). The BBC series fans actively engaged whereas the Warner Bros fans did not, even though initiators of the debate had spread their research at various platforms.

A few of the debate's outcomes that might explain why the *Sherlock* series are so successful will be addressed here. First of all, according to the experts, the sinister Moriarty was enjoyable as his character addressed the childlike playfulness which Polasek already identified in Sherlock's character as described in section 1.2. The character of Moriarty has indeed become very important, as there is a need for somebody to challenge the hero and Moriarty was in fact the only one that was able to do so. Apart from Andrew Scott, Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman were both also thought to have delivered great performances. Next to that, the experts appreciated the fact that the series had stayed very true to the canon. Above all, they thought that the location was the real strength of the series as one may actually visit the settings in London, an activity which many fans undertake. But more importantly, the series give a new dimension to the original tales. The true importance of the series indeed lies beyond the episodes and adds to the legacy in that its gets people to engage with the original stories.

One difficulty that comes with investigating online fan audiences is the fact that their platforms are truly international resulting in the inability to point out the British society. In her article 'Identity and the Online Media Fan Community', Faith Lawrence points out that people like to interact regardless of the medium they are using. The Online Media Fan (OMF) communities, as she calls them, are platforms where people interact with other fans with a shared interest. The majority of these communities are made up of TV and film audiences like the ones that are subject to this thesis. The users' activities include 'discussion and analysis of the shared object of interest' (Lawrence 233) and other creative activities such as 'art/image manipulation, video editing and setting up and maintaining online environments/archives' (233-234). All these activities are indeed found in relation to fan audience activity on OMF communities of fans of the series *Sherlock*, as will be explored further in section 3.3.

In all, the character of Sherlock Holmes may again be as popular as he was in the late nineteenth century, and likely in part because of the BBC series *Sherlock* and its online representation, that popularity has spread internationally. Still, it must be noted here that although the audience shows the series' popularity, the commercial success gives a whole different dimension to this popularity. Next to the BBC, also fan clubs and fan platforms have created a market for merchandise and for more online content. According to Peter Haining, Sherlock Holmes' place in popular culture is the 'foundation for his resurgence in popularity' (5). Haining also concluded that when the stories of Sherlock Holmes were rewritten for the medium of television, 'it soon proved to be just one further step in the development of the legend of Sherlock Holmes' (43). In line with Haining's argument, the conclusion may be drawn that the medium of internet has added yet another dimension to the experience of Sherlock Holmes but also to its character, whose identity was also developed online as will be discussed hereafter. Like the original stories, the series have evidently become a commercial success and are exploited, but what is more interesting are the people behind these numbers and figures. By giving an overview of all fan domains in the next section, the impact that the twenty-first-century *Sherlock* series have had on its audience and vice versa becomes evident.

3.3 Online Identity

For years, fans were regarded as simply 'people with poor social skills' (Poore 2), a definition which ironically could also have worked for the character of Sherlock himself. Benjamin Poore even suggests that Sherlock Holmes fandom has 'developed some of the characteristics of institutionalised religion' (2), which to a certain extent may indeed be the case as some fans are very dedicated in their admiration of their detective hero. Still, this parallel may not do justice to the capabilities of fan groups as such. As Alan McKee points out, a fan audience should be acknowledged for their 'productive abilities' (168), rather than seeing them only as consumers. Exactly because of the production and use of online platforms, Sherlock has become a 'digital native' (Haining 43) with his corresponding online identity.

Undoubtedly, mainly Benedict Cumberbatch has been getting a lot of attention since

his performances but his popularity has also grown to a large extent because of his online identity. There are various Twitter accounts which are used to spread news on the BBC series as well as on Benedict Cumberbatch himself. The Twitter account @Cumberbitches (209K followers) describes itself as '[t]he most glorious and elusive society for the appreciation of the high cheekboned, blue-eyed sexbomb that is Benedict Timothy Carlton Cumberbatch'. Another comparable account, which goes by the name @bakerstbabes, focuses more on the series as a whole and claims to be '[t]he Web's Only All-Female Sherlock Holmes Podcast'. There is also the Cumberbatch forum (cumberbatchforum.tumblr.com) on which fans express their feelings about the series, but mainly regarding the lead actor.

Next to these Twitter accounts which were created by fans of the series, the use of Twitter by Irene Adler in *Sherlock* and its audience's reaction in real life is of interest as well. Ms. Adler has her own professional Twitter account in the series called 'The Whip Hand'. At present day, several Twitter accounts exist under her name or her nickname, created by either fans of the series or women that perform the same job as Mrs. Adler who use her fame for their own businesses. The most successful of these is @The_Whip_Hand with a large amount of followers (44,8 k) and tweets (54,6 k) that underlines it is a 'parody #Sherlock account. [NOT run by the BBC]'. All *Sherlock*-related Twitter accounts mainly contain quotes from the series that fans particularly liked and discussions about the arrival of new episodes, although the ones related to Irene Adler mostly have sexually related hints in them. Surprisingly, the official BBC Twitter @TheWhipHand has many followers (9765) but posted only 13 tweets, a very meagre amount compared to the unofficial @The_Whip_Hand. The marketing strategy of the BBC is thus to be found elsewhere.

Apart from these specialized Twitter accounts, there are also Facebook pages which dedicate their content on the *Sherlock* series and are even more successful. The official BBC page has a staggering 4.8 million likes and is the ultimate proof of the marketing success of *Sherlock*. The page carries advertisements for the BBC shop, where many products are sold, from T-shirts to necklaces and posters. Another social media platform which shows the series' commercial success is Pinterest, on which various boards are created by users which

mainly collect humorous material made by fans. Here, it is evident that many kinds of companies are trying to get attention from the series' fans as well, as American news feed website BuzzFeed and music channel MTV have posts with titles like '16 times Benedict Cumberbatch Was The World's Sexiest Sherlock'. Therefore the question rises to what extent the success of the series depends on an spontaneous but active fan audience and how much is the result of marketing. The answer may actually be found on the official *Sherlock*-related websites.

Next to social media sites, seemingly independent websites like *sherlockology.com* ('The Ultimate Guide For Any BBC Sherlock Fan') are platforms which gather all sorts of information, both from social media, and from other online sources. Still, such platforms are mostly updated through social media use and the best way to keep up with the newest articles is again by following them on Twitter (309K followers) and Facebook (815.309 likes). Another such platform is *thescienceofdeduction.co.uk*, a site which is said to be maintained by Sherlock Holmes himself, including him writing blogs and asking for help from his audience with solving his cases. This site is part of a series of websites (including *johnwatsonblog.co.uk*, *mollyhooper.co.uk* and *connieprince.co.uk*) which are all created by television writer Joseph Lidster, as commissioned by the BBC. As is stated on the BBC site, these websites are all 'entirely fictional and form part of the fictional world of Sherlock Holmes' (BBC). As stated above, *sherlockology.com* appears to be independent as it is not listed on the BBC website as official Sherlock character sites, but at the bottom of the page it states 'Hartswood Films Ltd.', the company that produces *Sherlock* for the BBC.

Also on YouTube, various fans have created channels which contain clips from the series itself, but also interviews with the actors. Mostly, these fans create the videos for private use as a means of showing their interest in the series, but these amateur video producers reach enormous audience sizes between 40.000 and 250.000 viewers. Here, clips of the episodes with a shared subject are mainly combined with music with apt lyrics which may come across as amateuristic. Overall, these videos come across as typical fan productions but are sometimes made quite cleverly. As may be concluded from the amount of

viewers, their reach is widespread which makes these fan expressions rather influential as part of fan audience communication as well.

Still, there are also other online platforms that add to the spread of popularity even more. One such community is 9gag, an online accessible site with its own application that assembles memes. Benedict Cumberbatch, like Martin Freeman and Andrew Scott, is part of his own meme generation, which entails that a certain picture is used over and over again but with different texts. Memes and the study of them, called memetics, was introduced in 1976 already by Richard Dawkins, as he compared them to genes in his book *The Selfish Gene*. For a more suitable present-day definition applicable to Internet memes specifically, I refer to Patrick Davison who wrote that '[a]n Internet meme is a piece of culture, typically a joke, which gains influence through online transmission' (122). Memes are spread via platforms that are specialized in assembling these kind of 'image manipulations' (Lawrence 233) but the images are more likely to be tested among fan communities first where they are also created. The memes usually consists of a picture of the subject, in this case Benedict Cumberbatch, with a text that invokes amusement. Memes are definitely part of our Web 2.0 generation, one that is created by interactive users of the Internet. On platforms like these also people who are not particularly interested in the series are active, which may result in memes being incomprehensible for that particular audience.

With all the online success, one may wonder how the beloved actor responds to this all. In an interview with *New York Magazine*, he states: 'I flirt with it, I have fun with it'. As a response to his fans who like to call themselves 'Cumberbitches' he suggested they should change their name into 'Cumberbabes' making the community more feminist approved or even better, 'Cumbercollective'. Cumberbatch's success has indeed soared after his appearance as the most well-known detective of all time and he has shown himself to be an excellent actor in many succeeding films such as *The Imitation Game* and *August: Osage County*. His individual success as an actor thus also affects the popularity and our understanding of all the characters he plays, including Sherlock Holmes. In analysing the online identity of Sherlock it is, therefore, crucial but also very difficult to make a distinction

between the two personas. The image of Cumberbatch has become inextricably associated with the twenty-first century variant of Sherlock Holmes, an identity which has spread through the enormous reach of the Internet.

3.4 Conclusion

In all, there are numerous ways in which fandom may be expressed on the Internet. Apart from services as provided by the BBC network itself, there are also very lively fan communities online. The latter is most interestingly here, as it shows the power of online fan communities while the former is also successful at particular social media platforms but only because of its commercial approach. The fan audience is to be found on both social media, forums, specialized websites and even meme platforms. The importance of these fan communities cannot be underestimated and lies mainly in that they are in a large part responsible for the spread of *Sherlock's* success. As such, the internet and its online audience have given the phenomenon of Sherlock Holmes a new dimension. It seems as if the only way that the fan audience is kept alive is by feeding them new information, both from the series itself and by adding merchandise to the already extensive supplies. Both elements seem highly successful in doing so, although the audience is very demanding in the arrival of new episodes as well. The question rises whether the series in itself is still enough for such a demanding public, which is to a large extent responsible for the enormous online spread and demand as well. The principle of convergence shows that the series have outgrown the creators' original intention of mere entertainment into an almost inconceivable phenomenon. Until the release of the new season, the fan audience will presumably be producing and sharing more and more information on any detail they might find interesting enough to discuss.

Conclusion

In future, fan-fiction and adaptations are two options for further development of the Sherlock empire. As Poore argues, the original Victorian age stories written by Conan Doyle will eventually become too distant from our contemporary understanding as indeed 'it is our distance from the world of Holmes that creates the imaginative seed for adaptation' (13). The BBC series *Sherlock* has provided that our generation has its own version of Sherlock Holmes who from various points of view may be regarded as a contemporary figure. The fact that so many different adaptations are made even at present-day underlines that the original stories are far from exhausted and are still read today, albeit as a result of growing enthusiasm through these new variants. The creators of *Sherlock*, Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat, were not only great fans of Conan Doyle's work but were even inspired by the tales to such an extent that they wanted to create their own adaptation. Because of the success of the BBC series, the original stories also saw a surge in popularity; a development which quite paradoxically in relation to the Poore's abovementioned argument, underlines the survival of Conan Doyle's work as such.

Not only the professional world of television critics and professionals have recognized *Sherlock* as quality television, but that the fan audience was convinced of its quality as well. The audience has an excessive share in the spread of the series resulting in *Sherlock* to become a global success during the past couple of years. Indeed, the most evident conclusion that may be drawn from various elements investigated in this thesis, is that evidence for the audience's enthusiasm about the series is mainly to be found online. The reinvention of the character of Sherlock Holmes for this generation was done extremely successfully, not least because of the initial fandom of its creators Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat. They have not only stayed true to the original stories as written by Arthur Conan Doyle, but have also quite cleverly used their experience as producers to create a humorous adaptation which also contains all possible technological gadgets of the twenty-first century. The technological developments have indeed altered many elements of the series. For instance, they transformed the nature of the famous 'Holmesian method', as Sherlock now solves cases by

obtaining information via weather applications on his smartphone. Next to that, they have created an online environment that has changed the relationship of fans with the phenomenon of Sherlock Holmes into a much more active one. But also the series have already instigated a more active attitude from its audience by giving them hints and clues by projecting them on-screen. Next to that, the BBC being a deep-rooted institution in British society and Sherlock Holmes being a cultural phenomenon also adds to the series' reputation which has aided to its success. At the same time, the broadcasting network uses the series' fame in such a way that the audience is not only satisfied with commercial merchandise but is also triggered to long for new episodes at the same time.

It will be interesting to see whether the much anticipated new episodes will meet their expectations or whether even such talented producers and inspiring actors have exhausted their possibilities. We do know for a fact, that the BBC series *Sherlock* could never have been this popular if it weren't for the interactive platforms used extensively by its fan audience. Not only the producers were great fans of the original stories, also the twenty-first century audience was still intrigued by the what remained at heart old cases. This fan enthusiasm has, together with the unlimited possibilities of the Internet, resulted in a dynamic combination that has resulted in *Sherlock's* success. The decline of the literary culture as such is one development of our present-day society, something which has been quickened by the growing accessibility of the Internet. Series like *Sherlock* may be a positive development for a new take on literature. Similarly, one has to keep in mind that series like *Sherlock* would never have existed if the creators weren't such great fans of the original Conan Doyle stories in the first place.

The audience's demand for a new season of *Sherlock* is tremendous and it seems as if they need it like a true addiction. But before new episodes will come out, a special edition has been announced to air in December of this year. The clip that was shown with the announcement makes sure that the audience is triggered for new *Sherlock* material but asks yet again for its audience patience. Interestingly enough though, the clip shows 221B Baker Street in a Victorian setting which raises the question whether the modern Sherlock will be

exchanged for its most original adaptation after all. Still, it is for sure that the series have not been exhausted at all at this point, and new material will only add to the series' popularity and fan-made material.

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