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**The Evolution of Detective Fiction:
A Comparative Analysis of Investigative Techniques and
Characterization in *Sherlock Holmes* (2009, 2011) and
Sherlock (2010-2017)**

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation

To my parents, whose unwavering faith in me shone the brightest in my darkest hours, your unconditional love, encouragement, and sacrifices have sustained me throughout this journey.

To my brothers and sisters, whose kindness, teasing smiles, and relentless support reminded me I was never alone on this journey.

To my dearest friends, thank you for the laughs, the shoulders to lean on, and for showing up whenever I needed you most.

And to myself, for pushing through every challenge, embracing the late nights, and never giving up on this dream.

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Abstract

Screen adaptations today vary across narrative forms and genres, but it is detective fiction that has most impressively shaped popular consciousness. As one of the oldest and most resilient literary genres, detective fiction has undergone significant transformation since its emergence in the nineteenth century, it further evolved and diversified into police procedural, crime drama, and cross-media adaptation. At the heart of this development is the figure of Sherlock Holmes, arguably the most influential and frequently reinterpreted character within the genre. This dissertation undertakes a comparative analysis of Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* films (2009, 2011) and the BBC's *Sherlock* television series (2010–2017), focusing on how these adaptations mirror broader changes regarding characterization, methods of investigation, and themes in contemporary detective narratives.

Table of Content

Dedication	I
Acknowledgement	II
Abstract	III
Table of Content	IV
GENERAL INTRODUCTION	7
Chapter One:	6
Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction	6
1.1 Introduction	7
1.2 Understanding Detective Fiction	8
1.2.1 Definition of Detective Fiction	8
1.2.2 Historical Background of Detective Fiction	9
1.2.2.1 Early Development (Mid-19th Century)	10
1.2.2.2 The Golden Age (Late 19th – Early 20th Century)	11
1.2.2.3 Modern Evolution (21st Century)	13
1.3 Techniques of Detective Fiction	14
1.3.1 Classical Investigative Methods in Early Detective Fiction	14
1.3.1.1 Logical Deduction and Rational Analysis	14
1.3.1.2 Observation, Disguise, and Human Behaviour	15
1.3.1.3 Memory and Cognitive Organization	15
1.3.2 Evolution of Techniques in Modern Fiction	16
1.3.2.1 The Rise of Forensic Science	16
1.3.2.2 Psychological Profiling	16
1.3.2.3 Impact of Technology	17
1.3.2.4 Redefining the Detective Figure	18
1.4 Characterization in Detective Fiction	18
1.4.1 The Detective	18
1.4.2 The Assistant/Sidekick	19
1.4.3 The Suspect and the Criminal	19
1.4.4 Other Characters	20

1.4.4.1 The Victim.....	20
1.4.4.2 Law Enforcements	21
1.4.4.3 Side Characters	21
1.5 Themes and Motifs.....	21
1.5.1 Justice and Morality.....	22
1.5.2 Rationality vs. Intuition	23
1.5.3 Social Commentary	24
1.6 Film Adaptation	25
1.7 Conclusion	27
Chapter Two:.....	28
Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis	28
2.1 Introduction.....	29
2.2 Contextual Overview	30
2.2.1 The Original Sherlock Holmes Stories (1887–1927).....	30
2.2.2 Guy Ritchie’s <i>Sherlock Holmes</i> (2009-2011).....	32
2.2.3 BBC’s <i>Sherlock</i> (2010–2017).....	34
2.3 Character Comparison and Development.....	36
2.3.1 Sherlock Holmes: A Comparative Character Study	36
2.3.2 The Criminals or The Antagonists	38
2.3.2.1 Lord Henry Blackwood (<i>Sherlock Holmes</i> , 2009 film)	38
2.3.2.2 Charles Augustus Magnussen (BBC <i>Sherlock</i> , Series 3)	39
2.3.2.3 Professor James Moriarty: Ritchie vs BBC.....	39
2.4 Investigative Tools and Techniques	41
2.4.1 Tools and Techniques in Guy Ritchie’s <i>Sherlock Holmes</i> (2009-2011)...	42
2.4.2 Tools and Techniques in BBC’s <i>Sherlock</i> (2010–2017).....	43
2.4.3 The Main Development Keys	45
2.5 Themes and Ideologies.....	45
2.5.1 Justice and Morality.....	46
2.5.2 Rationality vs. Intuition	47
2.5.3 Social Critique	48
2.6 Conclusion	50
GENERAL CONCLUSION.....	52
Works Cited.....	55

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

General Introduction

Detective fiction emerged as a distinct genre in the nineteenth century, blending elements of rational inquiry with popular narrative conventions. Scholars identify Edgar Allan Poe's 1841 story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" as the first true detective story, as it organized a theory of interpretation, in which one detective is conceived as a hyper-rational intellect who solves a randomly inexplicable crime. It quickly became the convention in detective fiction storytelling to contrast an eccentric genius detective against dull-minded investigative officials who fail to comprehend how an otherwise inexplicable situation could be explained logically. Arthur Conan Doyle advanced this template, where in 1887, he introduced Sherlock Holmes. Holmes portrayed detective fiction's paradigm of Victorian "scientific" detection; he solved complex mysteries through constant observation and logical deduction. Conan Doyle portrayed an extreme model of the sleuth character, but his depiction changed the precursor template; as Burrow (2017) claimed, "Holmes came to overshadow his precursors", becoming the ultimate detective fiction breath-taking figure to the reading public.

Conan Doyle created fiction for two reasons. First, he gave Holmes a systematic method of inquiry; in nearly every Holmes novel, there is a chapter, usually titled "The Science of Deduction", as a way to resonate Holmes's empirical methods. Doyle refers to Holmes as "a man of science," someone whose knowledge of chemistry and forensic tools epitomized the Victorian rationale of empirical logic. Second, Doyle's thrilling stories paired with memorable characters brought the genre of detective fiction into the mainstream, international market. As Scaggs (2005, p. 41) and Smith (1998) argue, Doyle described Holmes's various feats of thinking in the detective stories to reinforce the important leanings in detective fiction, as this genre of writing coalesces connect attempts to unify entertainment with intellectual curiosity about puzzles. The combination of entertainment and logical investigation established a method for the detective fiction genre to template.

Into the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Sherlock Holmes has been interpreted time-after-time to fit within modern media and audience. Major adaptations include Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* films (2009–2011) and the BBC's

General Introduction

Sherlock series (2010–2017). These works demonstrate Holmes’s continued popularity; as Hayes notes (2016, p.13), Holmes is effectively “at the forefront of the public mind” through his onscreen presence in both film and television. The modern adaptations can be viewed as extensions or continuations of the canon; each new story sees Holmes’s original intelligence and Watson’s loyalty placed in a new and contemporary context. The media exemplifies how the filmmakers and serial producers have introduced Holmes retroactively to media-based drama, utilizing recent developments of technology, narrative style, and social norms, while maintaining the same level of engagement with the original detective puzzle tradition.

This dissertation is motivated by two interrelated aims. First, to understand how a character so firmly rooted in nineteenth century epistemology can be re-imagined for contemporary audiences; second, to explore how detective fiction as a genre negotiates cultural and technological transformations without relinquishing its core appeal.

This dissertation’s primary research inquiry examines the ways investigative methods and character portrayals are transformed from Conan Doyle’s original stories of Sherlock Holmes into these two well-known examples of contemporary adaptations. Specifically, this inquiry considers the following questions:

How do Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* films and the BBC's *Sherlock* series reflect the evolution of investigative techniques and character portrayals in detective fiction?

How has detective fiction adapted to sociocultural and technological changes while preserving its traditional narrative integrity and prestige?

How do the Victorian and modern London settings shape each adaptation’s approach to detective work and character dynamics?

To address these questions, this study proposes the following hypotheses that frame how each adaptation may negotiate the legacy of Doyle’s detective fiction within its specific cultural and technological environment:

General Introduction

Both Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* films and the BBC's *Sherlock* series may preserve Doyle's core deductive logic while adapting investigative methods to suit their media contexts, Ritchie's through stylized, period-inflected forensics and action, and *Sherlock* through digital age tools and onscreen reasoning.

Detective fiction seems to sustain its traditional prestige and moral framework as it incorporates contemporary sociocultural concerns, such as surveillance and ethical ambiguity, to remain relevant.

The contrasting settings of Victorian versus twenty-first-century London may shape each adaptation's portrayal of detective work and the Holmes–Watson dynamic in distinct but complementary ways.

To address the research problem, the research employed comparative textual and visual analysis to examine primary sources, Doyle's original stories, Ritchie's films, and the *Sherlock* series, focusing on narrative structure, representational style, and thematic content. It also involves detective fiction theory to contextualize shifts in investigative methods and character archetypes, and adaptation theory to interrogate how each screen text reinterprets canonical material. By combining close reading of dialogue and plot with semiotic analysis of cinematography and on-screen graphics, the methodology illuminates the interplay between genre conventions and media innovations.

The dissertation is structured into two central analytical chapters, coupled with a theoretical foundation. Chapter One will articulate the theoretical and historical trajectory of detective fiction from its early stage of development in the nineteenth century through to the genre's Golden Age and finally, into its contemporary regularity. This section will discuss the evolution of investigation techniques, characterization, themes of justice rationality, and the engagement of visual and cinematic representation within the genre.

Chapter Two will provide a directed comparative analysis between the original representation of Sherlock Holmes by Arthur Conan Doyle and two recent screen adaptations of the story: Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* films (2009–2011) and the

General Introduction

BBC's *Sherlock* series (2010–2017). The chapter will focus on the transformation of investigative techniques and tools, the characterization of Holmes and his relationships with key figures such as Watson and antagonists, and the ways in which each adaptation reflects its cultural and technological moment.

Chapter One:
**Theoretical Framework of Detective
Fiction**

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

1.1 Introduction

Detective fiction is not just a literary genre that deals with mysteries and solving crimes, it is a cultural phenomenon that reflects the evolution of society and its different values, philosophies, fears, and also technologies that transformed investigative practice over time. Nowadays, it has a unique place in both literature and visual media, offering readers and viewers complicated puzzles that engage directly with their minds arousing curiosity and imagination. As Marybeth Baggett (2022) states, this genre “offers a surprising window into the human condition, our internal and external experiences, our desires, our potentials, and our downfalls”. Detective fiction is not merely about solving the crime or unraveling the mystery. Rather, it is a genre that gets deep into theories about logic, observation, and the very nature of knowledge. Several critics and theorists have argued upon the different techniques used by the detective character, including Michael Cook who suggested that the detective narratives are simultaneously a reflection on the societal reliance on both rational deduction and the new technological practices in solving crimes (Cook, 1988, 45). This is clear when considering Sherlock Holmes as a character who embodied both pure, flawless deduction in one era and adaptivity and modernity in another (Matcovic, 2018, 450).

From the emergence of detective fiction with Edgar Allan Poe’s pioneering tales of C. Auguste Dupin in the mid nineteenth century to the advanced techniques of forensic investigation in contemporary adaptations, the genre has evolved into a complex literary and cinematic form. This evolution is described by Ronald R. Thomas’ work on forensic devices like lie detectors, fingerprinting, and mug shot shaping a whole new idea of investigations (Thomas, 1999, 134-137). For example, the contemporary adaptation BBC’s *Sherlock* and how it used the networked communications and digital surveillance to reshape the detective’s role within the narrative (McCaw, 2011, 19-22).

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

1.2 Understanding Detective Fiction

Detective fiction, as both a literary and cinematic genre, is multifaceted. It does not function as a narrative that only deals with crime solving, but also as a broader concept that sets a place for critical analysis, theories of reason, empirical investigation, and even technological advance to reconstruct events that lead to building the plot.

1.2.1 Definition of Detective Fiction

Detective fiction stands as one of the enduring and captivating forms of storytelling in both literature and social culture. At its core, detective fiction is mainly about the pursuit of truth, solving puzzles, and the restoration of order within a disordered world. The detective role in this genre is to solve the main mystery, usually a crime such as murder, through observation, logical thinking, and organized investigation. (J. Link, 2023, p. 17,18)

Defining detective fiction, however, is not limited to identifying a story about investigation and solving a crime, rather, it needs a deeper understanding of its structure and function within the literary landscape. John Scaggs (2005) describes detective fiction as “a wide ranging and hugely popular literary genre” characterized by “narrative of inquiry”, in which the detective’s logical reasoning and observation drive the plot, which makes this genre a reflection of human rationality and social desire for justice and truth. Scaggs adds that the genre typically involves a “Mysterious Crime” described as a complicated, inexplicable, “locked room” style puzzle as pioneered by Poe in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. It also involves the “Detective’s Investigation” through gathering clues, interrogating the suspects, and finally the logical deduction that leads to unveiling the perpetrator which represent the “Reconstruction of Events” that describes the detective’s explanation as the climax, assembling the crime and collecting clues and evidence into a coherent narrative that restores order. (Scaggs, 2005)

Julian Symons (1972) adds that detective fiction balances the “classic puzzler” with the “crime novel”, the latter placing greater emphasis on character psychology and social context rather than mere intellectual exercise. Tzvetan Todorov’s (1971)

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

structuralist analysis further identifies four essential stages, disturbance of order (crime), the investigative process, revealing of the culprit, and restoration of order, showing the genre's reliance on both puzzle solving and narrative closure.

Detective fiction, yet, is commonly seen as a subgenre of crime or mystery fiction characterized by its focus on an investigation that requires a systematic process that aims at revealing the truth on a crime or mystery. Numerous scholars defined detective fiction based on several core elements. The Crime, often murder or a form of serious wrongdoing that involves circumstances that defy conventional logic. The Detective Figure, portrayed as an individual who uses observation, deduction, reason, and perhaps forensic methods, to solve the case. For example, Agatha Christie's famous Hercule Poirot with his "little grey cells", or Arthur Conan Doyle's well-known Sherlock Holmes as the archetypal detective. The Narrative Structure which evolves the coherent, balanced flow of events and strategic reveal of information (Huhn, 1987, 451-466). The Puzzle and the "Big Reveal" which describes the correct assembly of clues that provides a satisfying solution to the mystery (Cook, 1988, 46).

1.2.2 Historical Background of Detective Fiction

Although detective fiction as a formal genre emerged in the nineteenth century, earlier narratives had many of its fundamental elements and similar aspects. In the 8th century, the famous Arabian tales *One Thousand and One Night* contained a tale that seems to be related, *The Three Apples* tale presents Caliph al-Rashid who gave his vizier Jaafar ibn Yahya three days to solve a heinous murder of an unknown woman after finding her corpse, or else he will be executed. He gathers the clues and investigates the witnesses until he solves the crime demonstrating a systematic approach to reasoning. (Pinault, 1992, pp. 86–97)

There was also a collection of adventure tales popularized in Europe by the sixteenth century. *The Three Princes of Serendip* published by Michele Tramezzino in Venice in 1557. The story describes the princes' journey where they use sharp observation and reasoning to solve several mysteries, such as identifying a missing camel only through grass and footprints, and explaining their clever deductions to Emperor Beramo after being accused of theft inspiring the observational logic central

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

to detective fiction. A similar work is *Zadig, or the Book of Fate* (1747) by Voltaire that was also mentioned in the 1924 book *Great Detective Stories from Voltaire to Poe* edited by Joseph Lewis French. The novella describes the Babylonian philosopher Zadig using careful observation and deductive logic to clear himself from false accusation which include settings of detective fiction as well. (Lundin, 2017)

These examples hint at the pre-existence of detective fiction. However, Holquist (1971) suggests that “the paradox that there is nevertheless no detective fiction before the 19th century [...] you cannot have detective fiction before you have detectives” since professional investigative corps did not exist before (p.139), until the creation of the London metropolitan police under the metropolitan police act of 1829 formalized detective work. This strongly supports that the real emergence of detective fiction goes back to the nineteenth century and not before. Moreover, Detective Fiction has continually reinvented itself since then as a response to the continuous shifting in the social, cultural, and technological contexts. This evolution can be divided into three main historical phases, early development in the mid-nineteenth century, the Golden Age of detective fiction by the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, moving to the modern evolution of the genre in the late twentieth century and twenty first century.

1.2.2.1 Early Development (Mid-19th Century)

Detective Fiction’s roots can be traced to the pioneering work of Edgar Allan Poe *Murders in the Rue Morgue* in 1841 introducing C. Auguste Dupin, the character that established the framework of rational deduction or what Poe famously termed “ratiocination”. Poe lived in a period of industrial revolution, modernization, and urbanization which transformed the closed society to a diverse society where there are always new people in town instead of the same people living in the same place for their lifetime, this led to an increase of crime rate which demanded the need of an investigator figure. Scholars have noted that early detective narratives can be read as cultural responses to the new urban realities of the nineteenth century, where the anonymity of urban life both masked criminality and demanded innovative methods

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

of identification and investigation (Cook, 1988, 47). According to Poe, whose tales were so popular at that time, it was not only because they are good but

These tales of ratiocination owe most of their popularity to being something in a new key. I do not mean to say that they are not ingenious, but people think them more ingenious than they are, on account of their method and air of method. (Poe, 1846)

Poe's work set the stage for many ideas and types of the genre's characteristics such as the detective's logical reasoning, the companion character or the "sidekick", the unsolvable crime, and the unexpected ending or the final twist. Poe's narrative techniques, which include the use of a first-person narrator to record the detective's methodical investigation, set the stage for subsequent authors to explore themes of logic, mystery, and the interplay between visible and hidden truths (Kobritz, 2002, 24; Thomas, 1999, 25). Poe's character Dupin inspired numerous later detective narratives that adapted to social, cultural, and technological changes, keeping the genre relevant and aligned with contemporary realities.

1.2.2.2 The Golden Age (Late 19th – Early 20th Century)

Following the pioneering work of Poe, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century witnessed the crystallization of detective fiction as a structured and popular form with the first appearance of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes in 1887 in *A Study in Scarlet*. Holmes, with his unmatched observational skills and logical analysis, emerged as the gold standard and the archetypal detective. Doyle's stories refined the conventions of the genre, such as the locked room mystery, the criminal mastermind, and the methodical decoding of clues shaping the readers expectations of detective narratives for generations. These new aspects in detective fiction in the first half of the twentieth century led to a flourishing of the genre, what is known now as "the Golden Age" of detective fiction. This period witnessed the crystallization of narrative rules that are exemplified in Ronald Knox's "Ten Commandments for Detective Fiction" which provided the audience with a narrative structure that contained both intellectual challenge and the reassurance of restored order once the mystery is solved (Priestman, 2003, 77).

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

This era was marked by a clear delineation between criminal chaos and the restorative power of rational investigation (Priestman, 2002, p. 81). The genre's structured plots and intricate details drew a broad audience and earned it academic interest. During this period, authors like Arthur Conan Doyle, Wilkie Collins, Agatha Christie, and Dorothy L. Sayers codified a number of genre conventions that defined the modern "whodunit". Agatha Christie's Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple became archetypes of the cerebral detectives, operating in "closed circle" settings where every character is a suspect. Dorothy L. Sayers, Margery Allingham, Ngaio Marsh, and others enriched the genre by integrating psychological depth and social milieu, even as they adhered to the intellectual puzzle at the story's core. (Matkovic, 2018, p. 453)

The Golden Age also witnessed the professionalization of the police and the gradual incorporation of emerging forensic ideas. Tools and techniques like chemical analyses or fingerprinting were still in their infancy, literary treatments of crime began to use and show the increasing of trust in empirical evidence even if their application was still more suggestive than systematic (Thomas, 1999, 39). In parallel, the genre's structured plots and intricate details drew a broad audience and earned it academic interest. The social impact of detective fiction expanded beyond entertainment. Detective narratives from this period were seen as a means to reaffirm social order in rapidly modernizing cities. The detective's role in "reading" the chaotic urban environment and extracting clues from both physical and human behavior reflected society's desire for control and rationality in a time of industrial uncertainty (McConnell, 1976, 172–183).

At the same time, American writers gave rise to a new kind of detective fiction known as the hardboiled genre in 1920s. Unlike the classic puzzle-driven mysteries, these stories were rougher around the edges, filled with morally grey characters and gritty, realistic settings. Authors like Dashiell Hammett and Raymond Chandler introduced tough detectives such as Sam Spade and Philip Marlowe, who moved through corrupt cities where violence, greed, and lies made it hard to tell right from wrong. These detectives were not distant thinkers, they were sharp, street-smart

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

survivors shaped by the social tensions and uncertainties of Depression-era America. (Bullard, 2022)

1.2.2.3 Modern Evolution (21st Century)

Detective fiction in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries evolved with technology and changing cultural values, moving beyond simple puzzles to explore complex plots, flawed characters, and modern scientific and digital themes.

One of the most important shifts detective fiction met is the integration of advanced forensic science into the investigative process. Detective narratives began to mirror the developments in investigation methods reshaping both of the detective and the nature of detection itself. This transformation is especially evident in adaptations such as the BBC's *Sherlock* (2010), where the detective combines both classic deduction and digital tools. Holmes is no longer limited only to physical clues but uses social media, digital footprints, and real time data, reflecting modern concerns about privacy, surveillance and the blurred lines of truth in the digital age (McCaw, 2011, p. 75-83).

The shift from early and vague mentions of forensic techniques to their full integration shows how detective fiction has always reflected scientific progress. While authors of the golden age such as Arthur Conan Doyle used empirical methods as tools in their narratives, they were more intuitive and secondary. Modern detective fiction makes science a key part of the investigation, reflecting a larger societal balance between hard facts and the unpredictability of human behavior. (Thomas, 1999, p. 230-239)

Detective fiction has stayed relevant by thriving in visual media, and diverse forms of shows such as American crime shows, British dramas, and even Japanese anime. Series like *True Detective*, *Luther*, and *Broadchurch* show how the genre blends cinematic style with deep characters and sharp social themes, contributing to what is known as the "CSI effect", the influence of crime shows on public expectations, making people believe real investigations rely heavily on high-tech forensic evidence, where the audience expect more accurate crime solving in stories,

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

underscoring the genre's role in both reflecting and shaping public perceptions of crime, investigation, and justice. (Buckler, 2024)

At the same time, postmodern detective fiction became more self-aware and subversive. Contemporary works have introduced detectives who are flawed, psychologically complex, and sometimes unreliable, moving away from the infallible genius model of the past. Writers like Paul Auster, in *The New York Trilogy* (1987), broke the genre rules with unreliable narrators, fragmented timelines, and metafiction. These stories question truth, identity, and the detective's role, showing how the genre can offer not just entertainment but also deep, philosophical reflection. (Spurgeon, 1996, pp. 345–360; McCann, 2005, PP. 74–89)

This highlights the reinvention of the genre and its aspects and characteristics. As John Scaggs (2005) notes, postmodern mysteries are “not only concerned with uncovering the story of the crime but also with examining how that story is constructed and interpreted” (pp. 139-142). This self-awareness turns the genre into a space for questioning its own rules, where truths, identities, and cases are unstable.

1.3 Techniques of Detective Fiction

Investigative techniques have been represented and developed in detective fiction, from classical deduction to contemporary forensic and technological methods. These techniques were able to shape not only the detective's role but also the narrative structure and the thematic depth of the genre.

1.3.1 Classical Investigative Methods in Early Detective Fiction

Nineteenth century detective fiction writers introduced some techniques of investigation in their narratives focusing on logical reasoning, empirical observation, and psychological insight. Early literary detectives such as Sherlock Holmes and C. Auguste Dupin relied on deduction, disguise, and human behavioral analysis.

1.3.1.1 Logical Deduction and Rational Analysis

The first writer to ever use logical deduction or as he named it “ratiocination” is Edgar Allan Poe after the creation of his character C. Auguste Dupin in *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* (1841) introducing the archetype of the analytical detective who relies

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

on logical reasoning and detailed analysis to solve crimes. (Thill, 2010; Markhabo, 2025, pp. 1-6)

Later, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle built on this idea with his famous character Sherlock Holmes. In *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), Holmes uses sharp observation and deductive logic to unravel a murder case. His investigative approach mirrors the scientific mindset of the Victorian period, focusing on observation, empirical evidence, and clear reasoning. Sherlock Holmes famously described his method as the “science of deduction and analysis”, arguing that “when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth” (Genot, 2020 7, Uchii 5).

1.3.1.2 Observation, Disguise, and Human Behaviour

Holmes’s acute observational skills, a main figure in both classic and modern detective literature, allow him to “read” people through the analysis of the smallest details like behavioral cues, ink stains on a coat, or even soil on a boot, figuring out their origins, profession, and recent activities. In *The Adventures of the Speckled Band* (1892), Holmes attention to minute details leads to the resolution of complicated case. His ability to adopt various disguises allows him to gather information covertly, demonstrating an understanding of human behavior and social dynamics. Such crucial skills played a significant role in the both classic and modern detective’s investigation demonstrated through several narratives. (Irshad, 2024)

1.3.1.3 Memory and Cognitive Organization

In the nineteenth century detective fiction, the detective’s mind and memory were the most important investigative instrument referred to as a “cognitive toolkit”. The ancient method of Loci, or as it is often called the “mind palace”, is a system that uses imagination to create a space where the mind is able to organize pieces of information, allowing for rapid and ordered recall. Sherlock himself, as the best example of a detective to portray this method, said that his mind functions as “a well-stocked brain attic” that properly stores facts and thoughts shaping the memory to be an intellectual storage that the detective uses for memorizing different kinds of information, even

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

rarely-used, such as chemical formulas, tobacco ashes, and footprints. (Doyle, 1891; Cox, 2021)

Classic detectives rely on their own memory of evidence and the memory of others like witnesses and suspects. In Poe's *The Purloined Letter*, Dupin solves the case by remembering and re-contextualizing previous cases and how authorities failed to think outside the box, memory helps him anticipate the criminal psychology. In Doyle's *The Adventures of Silver Blaze*, Holmes notices a lack of memory within a witness about a barking dog, which will be surprisingly the key to solve the mystery (Doyle, 1892).

1.3.2 Evolution of Techniques in Modern Fiction

The advancement in technology has reshaped the detective narratives through a remarkable change in investigation tools and instruments in addition to the classical methods. It also considers how these innovations challenge traditional concepts of the detective figure, introducing ambiguity, ethical complexity, and new forms of narrative logic.

1.3.2.1 The Rise of Forensic Science

Since the mid-twentieth century, detective fiction has highlighted significant advancements in forensic science, such as DNA profiling, serology, and crime scene reconstruction, which align with actual developments in the field. Developed by Alec Jeffreys in 1985, DNA analysis allows for the identification of individuals based on genetic markers. Dorothy L. Sayers incorporated early forensic chemistry in her golden Age works to clarify instances of poisoning via toxicology reports. By the 1980s, television programs like CSI, Crime Scene Investigation, had created the "CSI effect", leading audiences to anticipate expectations of immediate and rapid DNA results and advanced laboratory settings, that contemporary crime novels and films began to address and fulfill with thorough forensic practices (Berry, 2014).

1.3.2.2 Psychological Profiling

Criminal profiling, a concept developed by the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Unit (BAU) in 1970s, seeks to deduce the characteristics of offenders from various sources

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

including crime scene evidence, victim profile, and their methods of operation. Academic critiques highlight that psychological profiling combines inductive reasoning with forensic evidence, leading to profiles that can be both compelling and subject to debate (Winerman, 2004, p. 66).

In literature, characters such as Tony Hill from Val McDermid's novels and Will Graham from Thomas Harris' *Red Dragon* demonstrates how profiling enhances narrative depth by delving into the motivations of criminals and the psychological state of the investigator. In the construction of criminal profiles, it is crucial to adopt two different methodologies, the idiographic and the nomothetic. The idiographic method emphasizes an in-depth examination of an individual case, highlighting the specific traits and actions of the offender. In contrast, the nomothetic method draws on general trends and statistical evidence from groups of offenders, aiming to uncover common characteristics and behavioral patterns (Patherick and Turvey, 2012, pp. 67-99). Patherick and Turvey (2012, p. 67) argue that an effective criminal profile blends both approaches, integrating specific, detailed insights from individual cases with broader empirical knowledge to enhance its accuracy and reliability.

1.3.2.3 Impact of Technology

In the context of twenty first century literature, digital surveillance, hacking, and artificial intelligence have become essential tools for investigation. For instance, predictive policing algorithms that assess crime statistics and social media to predict potential crime areas are featured in Michael Connelly's Lincoln Lawyer series and Jeffery Deaver's technologically driven thrillers. Additionally, AI technologies are depicted as capable of reviewing extensive CCTV footage to pinpoint suspects, a theme explored in recent major films. The themes of hacking and cyberforensics, which involve retrieving information from encrypted devices, are prominently featured in Patricia Cornwell's Kay Scarpetta series and the television series Mr. Robot, illustrating the advancing frontiers of digital detection. Yet, these technologies raise questions about privacy, ethical boundaries, and the potential of misuse. Their portrayal in fiction highlights the tension between technological progress and moral consideration. (Egbert and Leese, 2020, pp. 1-12)

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

1.3.2.4 Redefining the Detective Figure

Scientific and technological advancements have fundamentally changed the concept of detective. The once prevalent image of the lone, solitary investigator is increasingly being enhanced or replaced by collaborative teams that include forensic scientists, psychologists, and data analysts, as illustrated in Kathy Reichs' *Temperance Brennan* series and television programs such as *Criminal Minds*. This transformation shifts the detective's role from an isolated and genius individual to a collaborative expert, who must navigate complex ethical issues surrounding privacy, algorithm bias, and the credibility of automated evidence. (Taylor, 2020)

1.4 Characterization in Detective Fiction

What makes characters in detective fiction truly memorable? the brilliant detective, their loyal assistant, the cunning criminal, or the witnesses who shape the narrative? Each is driven by distinct motives, personalities, and psychologies that propel the story forward.

1.4.1 The Detective

Detectives typically have exceptional intellect and analytical ability in the way they observe finer details and deduce logically supported conclusions. A detective's cognitive powers of observation and deduction are usually essential to their timing and effectiveness in solving cases that range from moderately complex to highly intricate. This level of intellect distinguishes them from other characters and allows them to hold an authoritative position within the narrative. Detectives may exhibit eccentric personalities, particular gestures, or a disinterest in conventional social interaction, behaviors that often reflect their intense dedication to crime-solving (Salemi, 2024, p.154). These traits can manifest in specific interests or adopted behaviors, which add depth to their individuality and emphasize the diverging factors established in character narratives (Fisher, 2018, p.45–50).

Even though detectives generally move through the narrative in a disciplinary role, they are often guided by a unique ethical compass that shapes their decisions and reinforces their function as instruments of justice. Founders of the classical

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

detective figure, such as Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot, introduced a character type defined by extraordinary intellect, capable of solving the unsolvable through logical deduction and a vast knowledge of science, evolution, and human behavior. Today's detectives, such as Sherlock in the BBC Television series, represent more humanized versions of these figures. While they continue to unravel complex mysteries, they also confront personal struggles, such as addiction, trauma, and existential doubt, which adds psychological depth and complexity to their characterizations (Delamater & Prigozy, 1997, pp. 5–13).

1.4.2 The Assistant/Sidekick

Since Poe's Dupin's sidekick and Doyle's Watson, the assistant has often served as a stand-in for the reader—asking the kinds of questions the reader might ask and grounding the detective's extraordinary powers in a more human context (Wurdeman, 2024). Too often, the side-kicks act as narrators, providing a perspective that the reader can relate to. Side-kicks often simplify the detectives' complex thoughts and reasoning, effectively negotiating potential gaps between the oftentimes abstract intelligence of the detective, with that of the reader while often also conveying flat-out what it is the detective might be doing, rendering their mysterious behavior more human (Rutigliano, 2020).

Side-kicks typically possess counter-property features or tendencies from the detective, emotional sensitivity, patience, or social skills, for example. Again, this relationship does not only emphasize the detective's oddness, but their interactions make for more nuanced narratives. The assistant often provides steady support and allegiance, which supports interviewing partners and often serves the role of sounding board for his or her theories and hypotheses. Their roles bolster the importance of the detective's role and their significance in advancing the plot.

1.4.3 The Suspect and the Criminal

In early detective fiction, suspects emerged as straightforward villains (thereby rendering their guilt transparent through a boring presentation of clues). The rules of the sub-genre demanded that suspect/criminals appear to possess depth and personality by assigning them with unique characteristics, dramatized backstories,

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

and provisional psychological [reputational] complexity. They operate under more complicated motivations and circumstances that augment the plot, and compel readers into pondering while reading moral, and ethical dilemmas involving “the criminal is often the hero or the protagonist of his own story” (Salemi, 2024, p.154).

Characters regularly display traits and possible motives that offer ambiguous and even contradictory information that distract even the sleuth, let alone the audience. This ambiguity deepens suspense, while actively drawing the audience into the plot. At times the text presents a criminal mastermind, a character that has the potential for cerebral dominance, or the same intellect or cleverness as the sleuth. This type of adversarial dynamic adds tension and represents both characters as intelligent beings enhanced with cerebral competition usually involving an emotional appeal. (Link, 2023, pp. 85–102)

In the Golden age, figures like the character of Professor Moriarty by Arthur Conan Doyle had become the prototype of the “criminal mastermind” presenting a high level of intelligence weaving evil schemed abandonment. Today’s crime dense television drama practices have Lang’s “criminal-type” (1931) in morally ambiguous roles like Hannibal Lecter and Dexter Morgan, but in reality-crime narratives particularly in discussion today the fictional antagonists are multi-faceted psychological beings. Due to capturing reader’s interest, readers find the ability to pity the character's motivations, traumas, and charm that compel one's readers' morality and entice their motivations in re-evaluating the complex notions of evil (Patherick and Ferguson, 2010, pp.177-218).

1.4.4 Other Characters

In detective fiction, there is a set of other characters they play distinct roles in the narrative. Among these characters, there is:

1.4.4.1 The Victim

The victim will usually be the starting point of the investigation, as their identity and relationships offer valuable clues. The way victims are portrayed may evoke a sense of sympathy that shapes the emotional tone of the story. In narratives that follow a

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

more traditional structure, the victim's role can be reduced to a basic plot device. This did not go unnoticed by writers such as Hadar Aviram, who recognizes how characters like Irene Adler or female victims more generally, can push against conventional stereotypes, act with agency, and ultimately influence the detective's moral development. (Aviram, 2011)

1.4.4.2 Law Enforcements

Law enforcement figures may serve as either partners or obstacles for the detective. Their relationships with the detective enrich the narrative, emphasizing themes of authority, bureaucracy, and justice. These figures alternate between being valuable allies, offering support and legitimacy, and highlighting the friction between institutional justice and personal innovation (Glover, 2021). For instance, in the BBC's *Sherlock*, Detective Inspector Lestrade often relies on Sherlock's insights, acknowledging his brilliance, yet also struggles with the unconventional and sometimes reckless methods that challenge standard police procedures.

1.4.4.3 Side Characters

Supporting characters play a vital role in adding complexity and authenticity to the narrative, presenting varied viewpoints and secondary storylines. Their relationships with the detective and their roles in the case can uncover vital information, introduce misleading elements, or evoke emotional connections, thereby enhancing the overall complexity of the story. Figures like Mycroft Holmes, along with comedic characters, contribute to the detective's universe, acting as contrasts and reflecting the social dynamics that energize the main investigation.

1.5 Themes and Motifs

Detective fiction repeatedly participates in fundamental conflicts (conditioning the narrative mechanics of each time stamp) the conflict of justice versus ethics, logic versus instinct and the function of the genre as a critique of society. The classical stories emphasized a clean moral landscape and an affirmation of logical reasoning in postmodern traditions. Stories often embrace ambiguity, question the effectiveness of science, and criticize systems. These stories will run the range, yet they relate

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

through consistent themes like the pursuit of justice, interactions of wisdom and instinct, and manifestations of contemporary social fears.

1.5.1 Justice and Morality

One aspect of early detective fiction involved the dichotomy of good and evil, and justice prevailed without ambiguity. Sherlock Holmes and his contemporaries existed in a world where planners focused on the good and bad and by solving the mystery restored the status quo and a set of values. There was a comfort in respect to crime being wrong and the notion that someone typically faced some sort of punishment. Early detective fiction on the typical whodunit offered a degree of moral stability, one in which the detective restored order and provided the reader to a degree of ethical certitude. Agatha Christie's *And Then There Were None* (1939) goes against this formulation as it reveals the flaws in morality of all the characters that it remains true to some sense of retributive justice. (Luis, 2019)

Over time, the genre emerged, primarily by the mid-20th century, as authors began to weave in moral ambiguity. Detectives became less a hero with the right values and more of a character intent on unfolding moral dilemmas (Cauthen, 2023, 74). Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe lives in a corrupt world where the line between good and bad is hazy, at best. Many of Marlowe's decisions are based on his moral code rather than the law, highlighting the battle between one's own moral code and the pursuit of justice in a lawful way. (Chandler, 1944)

Dorothy Sayers' novels, especially those featuring Lord Peter Wimsey, deal with truth, justice, and order through compelling mysteries that bring broken communities together. Sayers used the detective genre to restore the audience's values to the true, the good, and the beautiful. In this way, she not only presented entertainment but offered hope, moral insight, and a glimpse of a divine order in a disordered world (Angelina, 2016). Repurposed modern detective fiction distances justice further by placing postmodern views that challenge the idea of truth as objective but rather as a social construction. Writers like Tana French delve into character psychology, abandoning plots in which the resolution of the crime brought about moral clarity. In *The Trespasser*, for example, Detective Antoinette Conway

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

experiences systemic bias and multiple doubts about her decisions, directing readers to critique how fair or just the justice system is. This example along with the others further strains the notion of justice in detective fiction from simple moral tales to a complete examination of morality and ethical circumstance. (Aviram, 2011)

In contrast, postmodern detective stories undermine established moral certainties. For instance, neo-noir literature explores the “murky ocean” of ethical ambiguity, where justice can be postponed, undermined, or never completely realized. Characters such as Dexter Morgan kill “for the greater good”, thereby challenging conventional ethical norms while also satisfying the moral cravings of viewers. The detective in this genre operates in a context where legal justice often fails, and personal grievances replace institutional solutions. This transformation signifies a wider cultural skepticism towards authority and a recognition that moral intricacy more accurately reflects real-life experiences. (Garcia, 2018)

1.5.2 Rationality vs. Intuition

The concept of rationality has played a pivotal role in detective literature, where early detectives exemplify logical reasoning and analytical skill. A prime example is Sherlock Holmes, who extensively employs deductive reasoning to crack cases, frequently stressing the preeminence of intellect over emotional considerations. His method is similar to the Enlightenment emphasis on reason and empirical sources, and promotes the idea that logical analysis can solve any mystery.

As the detective fiction genre developed, authors began to explore how exclusively relying on rationality has its limitations, and began to employ intuition as an adjunct or accompaniment to rational thought. Despite his methodical approach, Hercule Poirot from Agatha Christie's work often comments on his use of “little grey cells” with an acute sense of human nature. By promoting rationality combined with an intuitive understanding of the complexity of human nature and empathy involved in crime solving, there is a rejection of the logical compartmentalization of irrational human behavior. (Marshall, 2009)

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

Contemporary detective fiction builds off this trajectory with protagonists that harmonize analytical reasoning with intuitive sense-making. Through deductions made in the television series *Sherlock*, Holmes even demonstrates moments of emotional awareness that augment his practices of investigation, creating an environment where intuition equals deductive reasoning. This change reflects a more extensive cultural awareness of the dynamic between rationality and emotion in understanding human behavior (Sabade, 2021, pp. 530-536). Anna Neill's (2013) examination of "Dreamy Intuition and Detective Genius" underscores the manner in which Victorian figures such as Inspector Bucket integrated logical reasoning with "unconscious cerebration", a duality that modern narratives enhance by incorporating psychological and even supernatural components. This integration recognizes that human thought processes depend on both logical reasoning and intuitive understanding, challenging the myth of absolute deduction.

1.5.3 Social Commentary

Detective fiction has long served as a medium for social critique, reflecting current anxieties and societal challenges within its plots. Early works often underscored issues related to urban growth and the collapse of established social systems. Arthur Conan Doyle's stories, for example, frequently showcase the clash between the rapidly transforming city of London and the enduring elements of Victorian social structure. (Simon, 2017, pp. 10, 17-21)

In contrast, mainstream narratives directly criticize institutions, including law enforcement, the judiciary, and surveillance regimes, exposing corrupt practice, bias, and institutional failure. Nordic Noir, such as authors Jo Nesbø and Dorothy B. Hughes, contextualize the crime within a racial and political landscape, using bleak landscapes as reflections of social discontent. In the current phase of fin-de-siècle literature, detective fiction has represented a range of social and political themes. Writers like Attica Locke have used the genre to examine systemic racism and injustice. In *Bluebird, Bluebird*, she combines these themes in a critique of the racial nature of the justice system present in East Texas. In Phillips Kerr's *Berlin Noir* trilogy, he illustrates the uncertainty of morally ambiguous choices, under the

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

circumstances of living in Nazi Germany, where the political ideology of Nazism corrupts legitimate law and that in a sense, political ideology replaces the law. (Edugyan, 2017; Major, 2019)

In addition, contemporary crime fiction has recently tended to address technologies effect on privacy and surveillance. Such stories, which demonstrate or describe the realities of living in the digital age, also discuss the benefit or detriment of how technology may or may not assist investigations, and the ethical implications with potential abuse. These stories represent the increase in public concern of data and the balance of safety vs. personal rights. Detective fiction's socio-political commentary within dramatic storylines enables readers to identify and question their society. The strength of the genre is its ability to adapt enables relevance, so it has the ability to shift, evolve, and offer thought and dialogue with contemporary developments in society. (Campbell, 2023, pp. 151-168)

Television series like *Luther* and *True Detective* interrogate and examine the moral ambiguities inherent in law enforcement, illustrating detectives who must contend with bureaucratic obstacles and their own complicity. This perspective allows detective fiction to function as a site for political and social critique, turning genre entertainment into a platform for public discourse on justice, inequality, and the complexities of the human condition.

1.6 Film Adaptation

Film adaptation refers to the transforming of a literary work into a film or television narrative. Adaptation is not a simple transfer from page to screen; it is a re-interpretation, and as such, the interpretation will be shaped by some of the specific formal and aesthetic elements of film and television as a medium. Adaptation is a re-interpretation which has raised questions of faithfulness, interpretation, and transformation for a long time, especially in both academic and pedagogical contexts. Early theorists such as George Bluestone argued that film and literature have different sign systems—that is, verbal and visual—therefore, they cannot be equated or judged by the same set of criteria (Bluestone qtd. in Rahmoun, 2018, 69). Thus, adaptations

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

are not simple imitations; they are re-interpretations into a new medium that do not alter the original texts.

For a long time, adaptation has generated debate around fidelity to the original text. The traditional viewpoint held that a “good” adaptation was one that adhered as closely as possible to the literary original. The more modern and widely accepted viewpoint of adaptation theory, particularly with regard to film, is that it is more of a representative and creative act. Brian McFarlane states that it is important to evaluate adaptations as “new works”; for example, evaluations can offer new ways of being responsive to the original texts, new meanings, and cultural relevance (McFarlane, 1996, p.15). Linda Hutcheon (2006) described adaptation as “a repetition without replication”. By this, she meant that while adaptations are artistic works in their own right, they can still engage dialogically with the original work (qtd. in Rahmoun, 2018, p.71). In effect, this means that a film adaptation is a reading of an original text that is influenced by time, culture, audience, and medium. Luciano Mariani similarly stresses that adaptation is not a mere reproduction but a form of translation, which involves both selection and transformation, especially when dealing with genre conventions like detective fiction (Mariani, 2001, p.2–3).

The potential of sartorial choices, lighting, performance, and music in visual storytelling can enrich our comprehension of character, theme, and tone (Rahmoun, 2018, p.88–89). Adaptations are also often considered interpretive readings of the source text, emphasizing a certain motif or altering characters and settings to highlight the issues relevant to a particular historical moment.

In the case of detective fiction, adaptations often highlight or modernize various aspects of plot structure, characterization, and/or police work. The continual re-imagining of the character Sherlock Holmes in different media is an example of how a text can be adapted to different historical and technological landscapes while still maintaining the basic narrative logic of the source text. Ultimately, this makes adaptation an active interpretive process through which audiences can reflect on how particular historical stories are reshaped for diverse cultural and artistic contexts.

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework of Detective Fiction

1.7 Conclusion

Chapter One has mapped detective fiction as a genre defined by its “narrative of inquiry”, in which crime, clues, and resolution interplay to engage both intellect and imagination. It has shown that the very possibility of detective stories depended on the nineteenth-century creation of professional policing, a development that made systematic investigation imaginable in literature, and traced how the genre evolved from Poe’s analytic prototype through the Golden Age’s fair-play puzzles to the morally ambiguous, technology-infused narratives of today.

The chapter explored classical methods of deduction, observation, memory, and early criminological influence alongside modern techniques of forensic science, psychological profiling, and AI-driven inquiry, and analyzed how protagonists have shifted from infallible geniuses to complex antiheroes while supporting characters have grown into collaborative partners and richly drawn social agents. Key motifs such as justice and morality, rationality versus intuition, and social critique were examined to show how detective fiction both reflects and questions cultural anxieties.

Finally, the chapter considered how film adaptations reconfigure these elements through visual style and narrative economy, setting the stage for a focused study of two landmark screen versions. With this theoretical, methodological, and thematic groundwork firmly in place, the analysis now turns to Guy Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes* (2009,2011) and the BBC’s *Sherlock* (2010-2017) to reveal how each adapts and transforms detective conventions for twenty-first-century audiences

Chapter Two:

Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

2.1 Introduction

Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* is universally regarded as the quintessential Victorian detective noted for his extraordinary abilities of observation, logical deduction, and scientific method of crime detection and explanation. As Burrow (2017) notes, Holmes quickly outgrew the limitation of whatever Doyle may have intended, becoming a "Victorian giant who overshadowed his literary predecessors and contemporaries", a figure "whose influence has shaped the conventions of the detective genre...ever since" (p. 1-2). Doyle constructed Holmes through applying "scientific methods ... onto the work of detection," based on the real-world implications of logic and observation (Burrow, 2017, p. 1). This chapter builds on the theoretical foundation laid out within chapter one by turning the case of Sherlock Holmes specifically, it compares Doyle's original stories with Guy Ritchie's 2009 film *Sherlock Holmes* and the BBC's *Sherlock* series (2010–2017), analyzing how each reinterprets Holmes and key genre elements for modern audiences.

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate how these adaptive choices reflect broader shifts in the detective genre. Linking back to chapter one, it can be understood that the Ritchie film and the *Sherlock* series as both adaptations and alterations of the original texts by Doyle allow people to entertain concerns surrounding fidelity alongside innovations. By carefully examining plot, character developments, forensic representations and embedded messages about order and society, the analysis demonstrates how adaptation resonates with contemporary norms while tapping into the intellectual inheritance of the original stories.

In order to trace the evolution of Holmes and the detective genre, this chapter begins by providing context and overview of Doyle's canonical stories and the production histories of the Ritchie film and the BBC series. It, then, proceeds to a comparative analysis of character development, focusing on the character of Holmes and his relationships to villains, then analyzing investigative tools and methods, and key ideological themes such as justice and rationality. By examining these dimensions, the adaptations can both be analyzed in the sense of how the adaptation have kept core Holmesian character traits, while also reinventing those traits through

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

a contemporary lens. For instance, Sommerfeld (2013) notes that Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* purposefully defines itself as “fresh, dynamic, and modern”, and its Holmes is characterized as decidedly more “streetwise” than the traditional “lofty toff” character style. Similarly, Moffat (2010) notably asserts that Holmes’s unrelenting logic makes him “born for the internet” while Sherlock’s relentless data-driven detective work serves as crucial evidence for this proposition. That suggests again the important role of these adaptations in framing new perspectives for a timeless character and genre.

2.2 Contextual Overview

Before examining each adaptation in detail, it is useful to consider the historical and stylistic contexts that shaped their production. This overview highlights, social, cultural, technological, and aesthetic influences in each version of Sherlock Holmes from his literary origins through to modern screen incarnations.

2.2.1 The Original Sherlock Holmes Stories (1887–1927)

The archetype of the fictional detective that we are generally familiar with originates with the literary creation of Sherlock Holmes, who made his initial appearance in the story entitled, *A Study in Scarlet* by Arthur Conan Doyle in Beeton's *Christmas Annual*, published in November of 1887. The narrative marks the commencement of a literary life that would comprise four novels, and fifty-six short stories that collectively comprise the Sherlock Holmes canon. The methods employed by Holmes, which he identifies and refers to as the “science of deduction” reflect logic and observation in formulating hypotheses. As such, Holmes represents a literary manifestation of rationalism typical of the Victorian period (Doyle, 1887/2003, p 22). While typically described in the stories as unemotional, eccentric, and socially inept in his treatment of others, Holmes is almost always described as regular-minded and intellectually capable, suggesting that he reflects ideals taught during the age of Enlightenment, dependent on the self-contained logical individual (Redmond, 2009, p 41).

The fictional character of the detective, “consulting detective”, Sherlock Holmes employed astute observation and logic to bring resolution to poorly

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

understood cases. Doyle's training as a physician, and admiration for Dr. Joseph Bell, who was known for his diagnostic ability, likely influenced Doyle's works of Sherlock Holmes (Baring-Gould, 1967, p 15). The Holmes presented in Doyle's works is often described as having an almost mechanistic capacity for recall and deduction of facts based on testimony or observation of crime scenes. The methodical categorization of the recall of knowledge is well characterized in the fiction as well, which he refers to as his "mind attic" (Doyle, 1892, p 64). The cases presented in the narratives reflected the Victorian confidence in observation based in the sciences, often employing forensic chemistry, analysis of footprints, handwriting comparison, and other techniques of observation and empirical testing. Furthermore, some authors have noted, Holmes's method of establishing facts resembles newly developed practices found in criminology, especially those that were contemporaneous with contemporaneous figures such as Cesare Lombroso and Alphonse Bertillon (Knight, 2004, p 79).

The stories, often narrated by Dr. John Watson, offered readers a window into Holmes's thought processes during his investigations. Watson's role as narrator allows Holmes's intellect to be seen through the observer's lens and lends a context to Holmes's exceptional talents. As Scaggs (2005) notes, the companion to the detective "acts as a moral anchor and rhetorical device", both quite literally and metaphorically mediating the intellectual gap between Holmes's genius and the readers related to their understanding (p. 53). Their relationship also reflects Victorian values for male friendship, vocational competence, and social order.

The late Victorian era, which saw a rapid rate of industrialization and scientific advancement, set the stage for Holmes's escapades. London, with its fog, and glaring social contrasts, became almost its character of the narrative with its atmosphere reflecting the cultural anxieties and aspirations (Knight, 2004, p. 45).

Doyle's stories appeared in newspapers such as *The Strand Magazine* in serialized format, which offered the stories to a broader audience and undoubtedly contributed to their immense success. Serialization of the narrative not only developed suspense but also created a relationship over the length of the story where

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

the reader became invested in the characters and tales of their investigators (Redmond, 2009, p. 22).

Importantly, while Doyle initially wanted to pursue his writing in a different direction, the demand continued from the public for more stories from his detective. What has continued the popularity of Holmes as a character from his inception, was the representation of rationality and order in an uncertain world that changed so quickly with the continuation of modernity (Stashower, 1999, p. 198). Holmes continues to live on as a character, still being adapted, and still enjoyable popular entertainment remains through the rest of the world.

To conclude, Doyle's original representation of Sherlock Holmes established the modern detective archetype of integrating logic, observation, and a fascination with 19th-century Victorian, contemporary sciences. The combination of Holmes' calculated reasoning with Watson's clear narration allowed the stories to entertain and embrace the ideals and anxieties of a turbulent era ushering in unprecedented change. The immortal appeal of Holmes is his resonance of order in chaos, an intellectual figure operating in an age of uncertainty, which has made him a character that continues to engage readers long after he was meant to live.

2.2.2 Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (2009)

Guy Ritchie's 2009 film adaptation of *Sherlock Holmes* is a kinetic reinvention of Arthur Conan Doyle's celebrated detective, utilizing traditional elements while taking advantage of contemporary cinematic techniques. The essential tropes of investigation remain in the film, but the detective is reframed as an action-oriented, physically agile character. Robert Downey Jr.'s portrayal reimagines Holmes as both a brawler and bohemian chemist, with his cognitive deductions represented with stylized depictions, of premeditated violence and thinking in his mind (Leitch, 2017, p. 129).

Ritchie's adaptation of the iconic Holmes narrative adds high-octane sequences and stylized visuals, which are representative of his aesthetic as a director. The representation of Victorian London is also gritty yet atmospheric in its representation of time and place but nevertheless utilizes elements of the aesthetic

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

style known as steampunk (Shoard, 2009). This edge to the world may appeal to audiences as a newer interpretation of a classic setting. The adaptation places Holmes in a world that is darker and more chaotic, amidst dense, bleak industrial smog containing signs of occultism and attributes of the proto-steampunk aesthetic as both an existential threat and historical milieu (McCaw, 2011, p. 117). This ambiguity underscores the figure of Holmes as a defender of rationalism, fighting against irrational corporeal threats while competing with nihilistic notions within an uncertain universe. As Porter (2012) noted, "Ritchie's Holmes is less an analyst of order and more an actor within disorder, bridging logic and spectacle" (p. 92).

The relationship between Holmes's literary companion, Dr. Watson (Jude Law), is more adversarial and grounded in feeling. The chemistry between Downey Jr. and Law has been widely praised, bringing a "buddy-cop" dynamic to the forefront of the story (Ebert, 2009). The film plays with the buddy-detective trope but emphasizes some tension and loyalty to each other and their profession. Chapman (2013) records their physicality as evidence of modern sensibilities about masculinity, intimacy, and shared trauma as a through line of their anxiety toward one another (p. 141).

Though much of the film remains true to the central elements of Doyle's work; Holmes's extreme intelligence and his ability to deduce information otherwise not available to him, new narratives and characters are purposely introduced. The major antagonist, Lord Blackwood, is constructed with elements of Charles Dodgson's planning; he conjoins sciences with the supernatural to maximize the intimidation Holmes might otherwise encounter (McCarthy, 2009). This narrative choice broadens the detective narrative, allowing more diversity in storytelling.

Critics have suggested that Ritchie's focus on action detracts from the detective mystery themes that are tied to the origins; however, some have attributed Ritchie's actions to breathe new life into the original profile of Holmes for a new generation of viewers familiar with the previous source and not (Scott, 2009).

In summary, Ritchie's Sherlock Holmes is a daring, fast-paced enactment of the venerable detective. The film, while respecting certain familiar aspects of classic

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

detective fiction, employs modern film-making techniques as its stylistic base to create a compressed, often action-based retelling of the famous character. The traditionalists, that believe that it based its own merits on actual ideas in Doyle's works using past homogenizations of Holmes character modes, may feel, formally, that this version of Holmes becomes simply an excuse for action and spectacle, which may distract from ideas, or possibilities, of Holmes's rationalism present in the Doyle works. This version of Holmes presents a respectable interpretation of Holmes, moving the character, and associated ideas, into the contemporary narrative contexts that are common audiovisual experiences of today. With a dynamic portrayal by Robert Downey Jr., a compelling Watson-Holmes relationship, and a richly stylized setting, Ritchie's adaptation brings Holmes from old literature narratives to modern-day, while proving that even the most classic of character can find ways to surprise and delight.

2.2.3 BBC's *Sherlock* (2010–2017)

The BBC television series, *Sherlock*, was developed by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, and was on the air from 2010-2017. This modern adaptation takes Arthur Conan Doyle's stories about his legendary detective and shifts them to modern London in the 21st-century. Even though it embraces the original stories, it adds new pieces, such as smartphones, GPS, and investigations run on the internet. Benedict Cumberbatch's depiction keeps the spirit of Holmes's key traits: social detachment, observational awareness, and cerebral arrogance, while reinterpreting them to the time of the 21st-century. The character describes himself as a "high-functioning sociopath", making for a more expressly psychological and emotionally repressed character than in the stories (Moffat & Gatiss, 2010).

The series is still intertextual, with episode titles of "A Study in Pink" and "The Hounds of Baskerville" explicitly referencing Doyle's stories. While still using intertextuality as a technique, the series is visually far more reliable: as events unfold in front of the viewer, on screen graphics are used as direct windows into Holmes thoughts and thinking (Mittell, 2015, p. 203). This reflects the 21st-century reading experience, which is no longer mediated through Watson and his memoirs but instead

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

documented as blogs. Martin Freeman's Dr. John Watson serves as a grounding base, supplying emotional experiences and moral equilibrium to Cumberbatch's Holmes. Their working relationship mimicked the tensions present in the original literature, adjusted from an exploration of gender specificity (Thorpe, 2010).

Cumberbatch's depiction of Holmes is situated within a hyper-connected, mediated world. His genius does not come without dysfunction. Greven (2018) notes that the 2010 Holmes "reflects neoliberal anxieties around perfectionism, mental health, and isolation" (p. 151). The show takes this further with its layering of emotional arcs, specifically regarding Holmes's developing relationship with John Watson (Martin Freeman). This relationship exists between the intellectual dependency of colleagues and the genuine friendship of comrades.

The antagonist in the show, Moriarty, Andrew Scott, embodies chaotic villainy with performativity. His machinations do not rely on the networks that are contingent on being a criminal outside of psychological manipulation and narrative entertainment. The antagonist relies on chaos, including the contemporary cultural insights of post-9/11 decentralized threats (Steiff, 2014, p. 61). The framing of Holmes in cooperation with John Watson against the chaos of neo-liberalism represents crime as a struggle in an ongoing print against instability.

Critics have positively noted the show retained a fair essence of Doyle's work with new interpretations, for instance, Tom Sutcliffe described the show to have "charm, wit and self-awareness" indicating that "Sherlock is a less than a victory, witty and knowing, while never compromising the glamour and zest of its predecessors" (Sutcliffe, 2010). It seems that the modern adaptation *Sherlock* (2010) can update classic stories that have remained charming, brilliant, and thrilling for audiences through cleverness and self-awareness.

In conclusion, the *Sherlock* series reimagines the iconic fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, for a contemporary audience, while retaining the core elements that made the stories entertaining in the first place. The series, while still offering modern updates, employs both an emotional depth and high psychological complexity, offers a fresh yet respectful take on Holmes and Watson's dynamic. Clever intertextuality,

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

stylized visual effects, cultural relevance, creates a product that is more than just an adaptation, it gives a sense of dialogue between the past and present, suggesting that even in the digital era, Sherlock Holmes is as compelling as ever.

2.3 Character Comparison and Development

Before delving into specific character dynamics, it is instructive to explore how antagonists and Sherlock Holmes himself have been reinterpreted across different media.

2.3.1 Sherlock Holmes: A Comparative Character Study

Both Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and the BBC's *Sherlock* (2010–2017) reimagine the iconic detective with modern sensibilities, but each focuses on different facets of Holmes's complex persona. In Guy Ritchie's 2009 film, Robert Downey Jr.'s Holmes is an unorthodox, hyperactive genius whose quirks border on the extreme. The film overtly nods to Holmes's drug use with Mrs. Hudson's comment that "there's enough [poison] in you already" – Watson even scolds him for drinking what turns out to be formaldehyde – and likens his need for constant puzzles to an addiction: Holmes gets a "rush" from solving cases and goes into "withdrawal" when idle (Liening; Cole, 2013, p.37). This portrayal emphasizes a more physical, action-hero Holmes.

Ritchie's detective is described as a "gym-toned prizefighter" and "pumped-up, anachronistically modern Sherlock" who revels in slow-motion fight planning and daredevil stunts (Mondello, 2009). Ritchie's Holmes is also physically hyper-competent, engaging in bare-knuckle boxing and choreographed fight sequences. Critics have described him as a "brawling supersleuth" (Scott, 2009) and "a pugilist with a chemistry set" (Shoard, 2009).

By contrast, Benedict Cumberbatch's BBC *Sherlock* is built around cerebral eccentricity. He is a modernized intellectual, analytical, emotionally detached, and socially dysfunctional. The BBC series presents him as a "high-functioning sociopath", a label the character himself embraces. This version of Holmes communicates primarily through clipped logic and rapid-fire deductions, often

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

ignoring social conventions. Critics and creators alike note that his eccentricity emerges from his disdain for emotional intimacy, rather than physical energy (Sutcliffe, 2010). Cumberbatch himself characterizes Holmes as “a very flamboyant, flawed, brilliant human being” who sacrifices normal life for intellectual obsession (Davies, 2015). The BBC Holmes is irascible and arrogant, excelling at pop-up deductions, yet he remains emotionally distant.

Downey’s Holmes expresses wit and camaraderie (his banter with Watson is a film highlight), whereas Cumberbatch’s is coldly analytical and “intolerant of mediocrity” (Davies, 2015). Both versions stress eccentricity, but Ritchie’s is expressed through kinetic swagger and visible mania, while the BBC’s Sherlock is eccentric in body language, tone and social awkwardness, he is “somebody who underestimates the true value of kinship and friendship and being part of a world” (Davies, 2015).

Downey’s Holmes, though quirky, often displays a rough warmth with allies, and his emotional detachment is channeled into bravado. For example, Watson quips that Holmes seems “manic, bordering on psychotic” in *A Game of Shadows*, highlighting Downey’s neurotic edge (Liening; Cole, 2013, p.37). In practice, this Holmes still respects Watson and Irene Adler enough to banter like old friends. By contrast, BBC Holmes maintains a stony social veneer. Reflecting his inability to read others’ feelings, he is often dismissive, famously asking Watson “What is it like in your funny little brains? It must be so boring” (Davies, 2015) and depends on Watson to moderate his behavior.

Cumberbatch’s Holmes shows character development across the series, eventually learning to value relationships. Early in the series, he mocked Watson’s sentimentality and human attachment, and even used it against Miss Adler who thought she outsmarted him, he told her that “Sentiment is a chemical defect found on the losing side” (*Sherlock*, 2012, S02E01, 01:20:07), but by later seasons, he expresses protectiveness and guilt, traits rarely seen in Downey’s more consistent characterization (Romano, 2017). Thus, while both portrayals highlight Holmes’s intellectual brilliance and detachment, Ritchie’s version leans into physical bravado

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

and charm, while the BBC's iteration deepens his emotional evolution through psychological realism.

In short, In Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), Robert Downey Jr. portrays Holmes as a physically adept and eccentric detective. This adaptation emphasizes Holmes's bohemian lifestyle and his proficiency in combat, aligning with Ritchie's vision of a more action-oriented detective. Downey's Holmes is depicted as a man of science, often engaging in experiments and showcasing his deductive reasoning through rapid-fire dialogues and visual cues.

Conversely, the BBC's *Sherlock* series reimagines Holmes in a contemporary setting, with Benedict Cumberbatch embodying a high-functioning sociopath with exceptional intellect. This version of Holmes is characterized by his emotional detachment and reliance on modern technology to solve crimes. While some viewers appreciate this modern take, others criticize it for deviating from the original character's essence, describing Cumberbatch's Holmes as overly rude and lacking the warmth found in Doyle's depiction (CCPL Writers' Block, 2021).

2.3.2 The Criminals or The Antagonists

Holmes's brilliance is only matched by the ingenuity of those who oppose him. The next section examines the principal antagonists who drive conflict and reveal different facets of the detective's character.

2.3.2.1 Lord Henry Blackwood (*Sherlock Holmes*, 2009 film)

Ritchie's first film featured Blackwood as a megalomaniac occultist, presented to have supernatural abilities. Lord Blackwood, played by Mark Strong, embodies a mix of the classic "criminal mastermind" archetype and modern anxieties about science, power and belief. He is depicted as a "backwards-engineered megalomaniac psychopath" that "has no empathy whatsoever with his victims", perceiving them as "five otherwise meaningless creatures called to serve a greater purpose" (Arifin & Hilmi, 2019, p. 573–575).

Blackwood's philosophy is apocalyptic and performative in nature, demonstrated in his staging of purported miracle and sacrificial acts meant to instill

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

terror in all of London. His instruments are technological and psychological; from hidden cyanide devices to a hidden glass dagger, he manipulates the audience into thinking he is practicing dark magic. This proves what Horton (2014) describes as “postmodern mythos”, where magic and science combine in a steampunk aesthetic to question modernity and control (p. 183). Ultimately, his intent is mass murder and chaos (he attempts to murder and coax panic in Parliament), and utilizes fear to accomplish both.

2.3.2.2 Charles Augustus Magnussen (BBC *Sherlock*, Series 3)

Magnussen is a sophisticated media mogul and master blackmailer. He is introduced early in the story as a “media magnate and blackmailer”, who has all of London in the palm of his hand. He is represented as completely remorseless, soulless – as noted that he is “no gentleman thief...” a snake, a shark, a predator of the vulnerable, and completely lacking humanity (Mellor, 2014). Magnussen’s outlook is brutally practical in nature: he uses private truths as a commodity. Rather than relying on violence, he utilizes intimidation and information. The most astounding feature of this scheme is that all of his enormous amounts of blackmail material are stored in his mind: he has a fictitious “mind palace” (his Appledore vaults) in his mind, and asserts that he can simply “close [his] eyes, and down [he] goes to [his] vaults” (Zielinski, 2014). This mental model would ultimately give him limitless access to the information he was hoarding against others.

Magnussen terrorized victims by exploiting their “pressure points” (e.g. violations of personal space, flicking Watson's face during an encounter, or even licking Lady Smallwood) to show he had the power to do anything he wanted. Magnussen's aim is to dominate through fear: he can ruin another person’s reputation for nothing, all while accumulating wealth and influence without firing a shot.

2.3.2.3 Professor James Moriarty: Ritchie vs BBC

Professor James Moriarty is the archetypal criminal mastermind and the arch-nemesis of Sherlock Holmes, first introduced in Arthur Conan Doyle’s stories as a brilliant mathematician turned scheming villain who orchestrates crime from the shadows, most notably in *The Final Problem* (1893). In Guy Ritchie’s Sherlock Holmes films

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

(2009, 2011), Moriarty is portrayed as a cold, calculating figure who combines intellectual genius with ruthless ambition, plotting large-scale chaos to profit from war. In the BBC's *Sherlock* series (2010–2017), Moriarty is reimagined as Jim Moriarty, a highly unpredictable and sadistic consultant criminal who delights in psychological manipulation and creating elaborate, deadly games to challenge Holmes. Across all adaptations, Moriarty embodies the dark mirror of Holmes, a mind as sharp as the detective's, but turned toward destruction rather than justice.

Moriarty (Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*, 2011)

In the film sequel *Moriarty* by Ritchie, Moriarty is a cold-hearted and calculating mastermind behind a conspiracy that implicates several continents. He is referred to as a “great mathematician” and the “Napoleon of crime”, as explosions and assassinations are happening all across Europe and he is plotting to “foment war between France and Germany”, so that consequently, due to his control of munitions factories, he will become fabulously wealthy - a self-serving, megalomaniac ambition (French, 2011). In this rendering, Moriarty perceives war and violence as opportunity, as though they pertain to a book keeping ledger of profit. His tools are conventional but massive, armies of hired assassins (like Colonel Moran), explosives, money and political influence. Moriarty talks and plans in clever conversation, covering the ruthless pragmatics underneath.

Cognitively, Moriarty is simply rational and professional; he does not give the impression of insanity, in fact, he is simply executing assassin plots on a chessboard. His purpose is domination and profit, and he has respect for Holmes as an intellectual equal, though he remains utterly amoral.

Jim Moriarty (BBC *Sherlock*, Series 1–2)

Professor Andrew Scott's portrayal of Moriarty in the BBC series represents an exceedingly theatrical, completely unpredictable, and extremely intelligent villain characterized by his greatest advantage, his ability to destabilize logic. Moriarty is presented as a “besuited psychopathic middle manager”, who stated “why does anyone do anything? because I'm bored” (Gatiss & Moffat, 2010, S01E03, 00:33:54).

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

Moriarty views life as a game, and through that lens sees Holmes as a peer intellectually made rivals “We were made for each other Sherlock” (Gatiss & Moffat, 2010, S01E03, 00:34:00).

Unlike the Ritchie villain, Scott's Moriarty is loud, flamboyant, incipient, and unhinged. He is uninterested in wealth and power, but most interested in games and the demonstration of control. His famous quote, “I will burn the heart out of you” (Gatiss & Moffat, 2010, S01E03, 01:25:45), represents the emotional violence, and rejecting the measured expression of Moriarty originally trades in Doyle's text. However, he uses psychological warfare and spectacle. He creates sniper plans through the local police, attaches bombs to innocents, writes sensational headlines in the popular press, and openly challenges Holmes at all moments. Moriarty uses the media to manipulate mass terror, and uses technology in contrast with Doyle's Moriarty, he is a villain of the information age and information society. Porter (2012), describes the modern Moriarty as “a metaphor for the uncontrollable nature of digital knowledge and surveillance” (p. 91). Thus, Moriarty philosophy engages in nihilism thrill seeking and proving his genius; he relishes mass panic simply for entertainment. His crimes are psychological puzzles designed to humiliate Holmes and question the validity of reason and justice themselves.

2.4 Investigative Tools and Techniques

In both Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* films and the BBC's *Sherlock* series, the character of Sherlock Holmes remains rooted in acute observation and logical reasoning. However, the methods, conditions, and tools that support his investigative work differ significantly between the two adaptations, reflecting the contrasting contexts of the 19th and 21st centuries. While the core concept of the ‘detective’ as a cultural figure endures, the adaptations highlight how investigative practices evolve in response to their respective historical and technological environments. This section reviews those differences in the context of Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (2009, 2011) and the BBC's *Sherlock* (2010-2017), particularly the ways in which the detection process, in each adaptation, is disrupted by the application of modern technologies, data (digital) systems, and psychological methods.

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

2.4.1 Tools and Techniques in Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (2009-2011)

Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) is set in late-Victorian London and emphasizes the classic, pre-modern methods of detection. The cinematic work systematically underlines Holmes's scientific methodology, manifesting itself in Holmes's reliance upon 19th-century observational and chemical-based techniques rather than any form of electronic gadgetry. For example, Holmes and Watson closely examine corpses and crime scenes employing only rudimentary laboratory apparatus, reagents poured onto stains, microscopes, and inspections of wounds to define time and cause of death. This reflects Conan Doyle's original vision of Holmes as a pioneer of forensic science; as one critic notes, Doyle "turned" 19th-century scientific discoveries (blood stain analysis, arsenic tests, toxin identification) "into an investigatory system" (Cox, 2011). For instance, in the first film, Holmes establishes a small chemical laboratory in his flat, experimenting with poisons and flammable compounds (Arifin & Hilmi, 2019, p. 575). In *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2011), Holmes attends a recent bombing site and dissolves metal fragments in a vial of nitric acid, observing the characteristic orange fumes that reveal Moriarty's use of nitroglycerin-based explosives (Ritchie, 2011, 01:18:20). He also employs fingerprinting, definitive autopsy, toxicology, and ballistics, despite the fact fingerprinting is only still an embryonic practice in the 1890s. Holmes's skill set reflects what McCaw (2011) would refer to as "historical license," one of the cinematic techniques afforded to filmmakers is to juxtapose period-appropriate aesthetic decorum with modern convention of scientific accuracy (p. 118). These scenes underline Holmes' identity as a "forensic expert" in an era before modern labs, he relies on goggles, slides, and test tubes much as Doyle's detective did on fingerprint impressions and paper exposure tests (Siegel, 2017).

In addition to traditional laboratory observations, Ritchie's Holmes uses extensive pure observation and deduction often organized in stylized sequences or montages of Holmes thinking. He reconstructs crime scenes, analyzes physical evidence (ashes, footprints, bruising), and generates hypotheses through experimentation. One example is the start of the film, when Holmes narrates to Watson about the injuries and wounds on a fallen attacker: "Head cocked to the left...

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

partial deafness... two - throat - paralyze vocal cords...” (Ritchie, 2009, 00:01:42), as a kind of analytical voice-over. This fast-lived montage of Holmes’s deductions, indicated on screen with a floating text and diagrams, substitutes for Watson’s chronicling, while exhibiting Holmes’s deductive “logic of the unseen” (Bishop, 2018, p. 8). Thus, Holmes's logic maintains and supports this Enlightenment persona, a detective whose authority emerges from knowledge, rather than violent application of force or social status.

In addition to instrumentalizing knowledge, Holmes' logic appears as a rapid (but visible) internal calculative process. Ritchie's direction uses slow-motion, fight choreography, and Holmes' internal narration to represent external anticipation in deduction. At one particular moment, he anticipates a series of blows, indicating that intelligence is not merely conceptual but also tactical and physical. This dramatized deductive act serves as a cinematic device to reinforce his encoding and control of situational analysis, in line with Scaggs's (2005) definitions of detective fiction as “an epistemological performance” (p. 42).

These analog methods give way, in the BBC’s modern adaptation, to truly digital and psychological tools.

2.4.2 Tools and Techniques in BBC’s *Sherlock* (2010–2017)

The BBC’s *Sherlock* relocates Holmes to the 21st century, and its investigative methods are thoroughly modern. Holmes operates within a world of digital technologies, psychological profiling, and mass surveillance. Benedict Cumberbatch's Holmes brings his canonical intellect but expands his toolkit to include real-time internet searches, GPS tracking, forensic databases and hacking. These tools are a contemporary extension of his thinking, thereby turning him into an “information age savant” (Zielinski, 2014, para 3).

The visual flow of the series frequently depicts Holmes and Watson exchanging information about cases via smartphones, displaying texts, emails and online images layered on top of the action, functioning as diegetic graphics simulating a 21st century media experience. For example, Holmes has the autonomy to incorporate surveillance footage with the ability to zoom-in and notes the information

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

in real time via FaceTime to a witness. One academic commentator observes that Sherlock “mimics current media practices” by making the smartphone camera and the data exchange (texting, photos, and video chats) an integral part of the investigation (Bishop, 2018, p. 9). In the first episode "A Study in Pink", Holmes infers information of the murderer from GPS logs and phone pings and is also cognizant of online databases and public records leaving Holmes using public records from a web page or online presence as a way to determine and track identity. These strategies are aligned to what Mittell (2015) terms "algorithmic reasoning", where detection becomes a form of pattern recognition, circulating through networked and digital ecosystems (p. 203).

The use of surveillance technologies and forensics is especially highlighted. Characters in *Sherlock* are aware of cameras and their trails of data, and this awareness is often exploited by Holmes. In addition to the sense that metadata and profiles of social media can become an admissible “piece of evidence”. Moreover, the visual style of the show ensures that critical information frequently appears as computer generated text on screen or comes from devices, such as John's blog entries, e mails, or Moriarty's pre-recorded broadcasts. Another key innovation of *Sherlock* is presenting government-level surveillance. In the episode “His Last Vow”, Holmes is shown in possession of government resources, like an access to military records, national security records, and biometric data, demonstrating how solving crime is embedded within state infrastructure in the 21st century. This blurs the line between detective and intelligence operative, echoing the transformation that began in *A Game of Shadows*.

Psychological profiling also plays a significant role in *Sherlock*. Unlike Ritchie’s Holmes, who rarely contemplates motive beyond physical evidence, the Cumberbatch Holmes surmises criminal intent based on behavioral tics, indicators of trauma, or patterns of compulsion. In “The Reichenbach Fall”, he deduces Moriarty's identity not through observation of clues, but inference based on the patterns of media that Moriarty consumed, in addition to social behaviors of those around him. The use of media as a discrete source of learning suggests a change in thinking from deduction

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

based on static observations of behavior, to inference based on being able to measure behavioral tendencies of individuals (Greven, 2018, p. 151).

A central innovation is Holmes's use of the "mind palace", a system based on ancient memory techniques with the requirement to store immense amounts of information that mimic a digital operating system. The idea of being able to structure all of this information internally would allow for instant recall of something that happened long ago, complex files of criminals, personal and family histories, often represented visually with on-screen graphics (Zielinski, 2014). The series thus collapses the boundary between memory and computation, framing Holmes as a hybrid of man and machine.

2.4.3 The Main Development Keys

Sherlock Holmes adaptations chart more than a century of transformation in detective work. In the late-Victorian world of Ritchie's films, detection is a hands-on profession. Holmes creates makeshift laboratories where he uses tube test tubes, microscopes, and acids to uncover poison and explosive residue; he checks for fingerprints, analyzes blood, and reconstructs crime scenes through laborious physical experiments. Each piece of evidence is something tangible from the mystery he works with directly. In sharp contrast, the BBC's modern Holmes lives in an information age, sitting on phone records, digitally tracing footprints, and "borrowing" all sorts of answers from surveillance evidence, he stores and retrieves vast networks of facts in his mental "mind palace", running mental algorithms as effortlessly as a computer. Yet across both eras, the essence remains the same, Holmes uses whatever tools his century supports to solve mysteries and expose hidden truths, seamlessly shifting from chemist in a laboratory to cybernetic detective without losing an ounce of the innate ability to read what could easily be missed.

2.5 Themes and Ideologies

Both *Sherlock Holmes* (2009,2011) and the BBC's *Sherlock* (2010-2017) engage with various significant themes associated with detective fiction. These include the concepts of justice and morality, the tension between rational deduction and intuitive insight, and the broader societal commentary embedded in the detective narrative.

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

Despite coming from the same roots, both adaptations deal with these themes quite differently across historical settings, narrative styles, and cultural contexts.

2.5.1 Justice and Morality

Although varying in their means of signification, both adaptations emphasize Holmes's dedication to justice. Doyle's original detective is explicitly moralistic, as Heller notes that Holmes represents both scientific and moral values when "he tries to rescue values from people who would destroy them". In Heller's summary, the classic Holmes "formula" includes a "devotion to justice", with villains being almost a caricature of selfishness. For this reason, Holmes is always oriented to fight "to preserve order" in society (Wisser, 2000, p. 30-31). Cawelti also points out that detective stories provide a sense of reassurance by depicting psychopaths (chaos) being brought under the rational control of the detective to restore social order (Kelleghan, 2001, pp. 1, 208-216).

In the 2009 cinematic production, *Sherlock Holmes* by Guy Ritchie, this moral agenda is articulated in a willfully action-heavy way. Holmes physically confronts the occult crimes of Lord Blackwood and ultimately terminates a villainous Moriarty representing a fate worse than death, emphasizing Ritchie's insistence that Holmes is a driven proponent of justice. In the film, Holmes's code is made literal; he is an avenging hero that battles crime for the sake of others. Justice in the Ritchie film is emphatically external, Holmes's triumphs over masked cultists and gangsters represent visual guarantees of good versus evil emphasizing moral order.

By contrast, the BBC's *Sherlock* diverges from a similar dramatization of ethical ambiguity. The Sherlock Cumberbatch character typically skews in his non-investigative work and police procedures to closing out matters, for example, assessing fingerprints on dead bodies and killing wrongdoers, and even sacrifices personal relationships and social obligations to serve the greater good. Yet as an adaptation of the Doyleian ethic, the series eventually reaffirms that Sherlock serves justice. Even when Holmes's methods are unsettling, the narrative compels him to thwart evils (Moriarty's schemes, terrorist plots, and so on) in the end. These conclusions correspond with Heller's point that Sherlock's "passion" is solving

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

puzzles, and not violence for its own sake, or evil, but that he goes about real-world justice and deals with enemies entirely focused on themselves (Wisser, 2000, p. 30-33).

In both versions, Holmes is portrayed as a defender of moral order, aligning with the ideological function of the detective to assert social values by reinstating disorder. Ritchie's Holmes, almost a vigilante enforcer of social order, is in direct contrast to the BBC's Holmes as an odd genius, bringing deductive success to law and ethics. In each case the theme of justice, vengeance against wrongdoers, and protection of the innocent drives the plot. Heller states that "Holmes battles crime to maintain order" (Wisser, 2000, p. 31), a formulation that is notoriously explicit in the heroics of the 2009 film, and fulfilled in the series by virtue of Sherlock's victories, even when presented with some level of moral complexity.

2.5.2 Rationality vs. Intuition

Sherlock Holmes's methods usually privilege reason and evidence over intuition or emotion, a tension that both adaptations explore. Critics have identified that Doyle's Holmes is set to subordinate feelings to logic as "intuition and emotion...must be vigorously circumscribed and controlled" in part of his procedure (Somerset, 2024, p.478). As Heller notes, Doyle "combined [Holmes's] interest in both the scientific and the moral," making Holmes a "scientific detective" who relies on careful analysis (Cited in Wisser, 2000, p. 30). In *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), Ritchie calls upon Holmes' rational brilliance to demonstrate a speeded-up, drama-laden depiction of intuition. A notable scene includes the depiction of Holmes "seeing" connections in slow motion. This becomes an overt characterization of the leap from data to deduction. This suggests Holmes's intuitions are supercharged without the disconnect from "evidence" as emotional antecedent. Ritchie is able to depict Holmes as highly intelligent yet, at times, paints his reasoning as almost instinctual in whole.

The BBC's *Sherlock* similarly foregrounds Holmes's rational mind, albeit in a modern idiom. The series uses text overlays and a "mind palace" motif to allow the audience to see data included in his memory, and how Holmes brings it to bear in his reasoning. Although Sherlock frequently claims to be a "high-functioning sociopath"

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

(Kustritz, 2017, p. 150), he operates by logic, as he explains clues like a science, and even to the level of chemical analysis or computer forensics. The series acknowledges a gap between pure logic and human intuition to navigate the criminal cases presented within the episodes. For example, episodes like “The Reichenbach Fall” illustrate emotion and hesitation on Sherlock’s part, and even imperfect conclusions based on minimal evidence. But ultimately Sherlock’s intellect prevails.

According to Takanashi (2017), Holmes’s “cognitive process strikes a balance between data and narrative” to maintain critical detachment (pp. 250-265). In other words, Holmes does not rely solely on cold, hard facts, nor chaotic imagination, but is logically trying to find a “middle course” around dry rationality and chaotic intuition. This balance appears in both adaptations. In Ritchie’s adaptation, the character employs rigorous science (tests, ballistics) but finds himself making jumps of pattern-recognition. In *Sherlock*, Holmes’s adaptability offers similar elements, as he continuously takes advantage of technology (smartphone records, forensic scans) and boasts knowledge while experiencing jumps of bold guess-work. As Heller observes, Holmes is driven by “a passion for solving problems and interest in little else” (Wisser, 2000, p. 30), that is, logic is Holmes’s pleasure and focus. The film and series represent Sherlock’s feats of deduction as the fruit of obsessive rationality, even as they represent the burden of his “supernatural” leaps. Therefore, each adaptation represents the theme of “rationality vs. intuition” in a similar way, Holmes is above all a “thinker”, but adaptations do not deny that his intuition has a kind of “genius” quality. As one scholar paraphrases Doyle, Holmes views himself as “the most perfect reasoning and observing machine” a self-image that Ritchie’s Holmes emulates in bravado and that BBC’s *Sherlock* internalizes in dark humor. (Somerset, 2024, p.478).

2.5.3 Social Critique

Both adaptations explore their social context through a projection of Sherlock as a commentary on prevailing values. In Doyle's world, Holmes famously gives voice to the Victorian social order, but also exposes the underbelly of empire and capital. Modern critics insist that Holmes can serve as a “flâneur of human capital”, aware of

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

the industrial capitalist implication on the individual (Gelly, 2011, p. 93-106). In the cinematic adaptation from 2009, Victorian London is depicted as a class society under the threat of Blackwood's aristocratic cult, and Moriarty's new wave of technology and crime, and Holmes ultimately defends the existing order, represented by the nobility and the Empire (the Crown), by reclaiming order through his intervention. The film does not display much sympathy for the fallen, and keeps Holmes squarely in the gentlemen and policeman world. In this way, it replicates an ideology that explains how "the detective played a crucial role in Victorian ideology by restoring values to a world that had set out to destroy them", which is exemplified again by Holmes putting the world back together (Wisser, 2000, p. 30-31).

The BBC's *Sherlock*, set in a multicultural modern London, addresses different social issues but similarly tends to valorize elite expertise. Kustritz (2017) notes that the series updates Holmes' profile within the 20th-21st centuries to emphasize his exceptionalism and that Sherlock is even diagnosed as a "high-functioning sociopath" distinct from ordinary people. This construction magnifies the idealization of crime-fighting as a pursuit of gifted and highly-specialized professionals that is sanctioned by the larger society (p. 150). The world of *Sherlock* is populated by a cast of characters who are doctors, agents of the government, and wealthy clients, while the ordinary citizen very rarely drives the plot. At the same time, the show conjures contemporary anxieties such as technology, terrorism, and the impact of social media, as audiences see clues developed by BBC journalists or the Internet sleuthing for leads, and Sherlock as a character exists arranged about navigating these issues in a constructed world of modern dangers. In effect, the series is also a critique of the effects of "neoliberal" society on criminality which is dated in its depictions, even in the narratives that explore Moriarty's terror campaigns in "The Great Game", ultimately appearing to echo the cultural anxiety about terrorism, or Sherlock as a new type of expert in surveillance and data viewing. Yet even these plotlines reaffirm that Sherlock's rational order will prevail (McCaw, 2011, pp. 26-27, 85-87, 124-127).

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

Both narratives utilize Holmes in their ideological function of exposing and containing social “chaos”. In this sense, Cawelti’s assertion is entirely relevant: whether in print or on screen, the detective story encodes social disarray into a cabinet of solutions (Kelleghan, 2001, pp. 208-216). Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes* observes Victorian traditions such as class hierarchy and imperial confidence as menaced by some irrational evil that Holmes reinstates with his actions. Similarly, *Sherlock* presents 21st-century Britain as yet also bewitched and bewildered (globalism, terrorism, mental health), yet every problem is become solvable by the same genius. Thus, the two versions privilege a critique of society by representing its weighty fear, yet at the same time they uphold core values like order and the rule of law. *Sherlock* series represent a modernization of Doyle’s themes in which Sherlock’s marginal outsider figure, “consulting detective”, remains, but now against a backdrop of contemporary social issues. Regardless of setting, each adaptation uses Holmes to articulate concerns of its time, while still endorsing, as one analysis notes, the detective’s role in “consolidating the professionalization of crimefighting” and maintaining the elite order of knowledge (Kustritz, 2017, p. 150-151).

2.6 Conclusion

The comparative analysis in Chapter Two demonstrates that, despite marked differences in style and tone, Guy Ritchie’s films and the BBC’s *Sherlock* reaffirm Holmes as a rationalist at the core of every narrative. Ritchie presents Holmes as a swashbuckling hero of modernity, more physical prowess and streetwise cunning added to forensic ingenuity. This frames his revival as intentionally more “streetwise” than aristocratic (Sommerfeld 2012, p. 1). In return, the BBC series highlights Holmes’s cybernetic acumen, visually rendering his thought processes through high tech overlays and “tech geek” gadgetry (Bochman 2014, pp. 2–4). Supporting characters and villains also show their times: Ritchie’s Lord Blackwood mixes otherworldly threat with empire politics, while Sherlock’s Moriarty uses computers and media to bring modern fears. Ways of investigating change at the same time, from Victorian fingerprint noting and cigarette ash guessing, through early forensic science and hand-to-hand fight, to mobile problem-solving interfaces and connected

Chapter Two: Sherlock Holmes Adaptations: A Comparative Analysis

databases, yet the stories' focus on proof-based thinking always refers back to Doyle's original.

Both adaptations ideologically advance Holmes's mission of restoring order and dispensing justice, but their social contexts differ. Thus, Ritchie's late nineteenth century London foregrounds class dynamics and the legacy of empire; Holmes here is a departure from "class bound" conventions. On the other hand, the BBC places him within a multicultural, media saturated world grappling with issues on privacy, mental health, and terrorism. However, as noted by critics, even though the show *Sherlock* acknowledges modern-day diversity it often perpetuates imperial hierarchies (Bin Riaz 2018, p. 17). In this respect then these adaptations offer an illustration of that cyclical movement between repetition and innovation in detective fiction: not remakes but interpreters of Doyle's myth to reflect changing cultural and technological concerns. Through them, therefore, the very genre of logic, justice, and individuality is reaffirmed—how Holmes's Victorian rationalism can be refracted through modern ideologies to remain both recognizable and resonant.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

General Conclusion

The fundamental dynamics of the detective story, brilliant deduction, the emphasis of “the little things”, and a scientific approach to crime, have both persisted and transformed as Sherlock Holmes moves from Doyle’s Victorian tales to Guy Ritchie’s films and the BBC’s *Sherlock*. In every version, Holmes remains the archetype of the analytical detective, but in each version, Holmes adapts his methods to suit its era. Doyle’s Holmes relies on physical evidence, chemistry and newspapers; Ritchie’s Holmes dramatizes deduction through rapid visual sequences and kinetic action; and the BBC’s Holmes strives to use smartphones, and data analysis tools to collect and manipulate data while borrowing from the original nineteenth century data collection and analysis tools (Scaggs, 2005, p. 41). Across media, novels, film, and television, Holmes’s emphasis on “the little things” remains, even as his instruments have evolved from magnifying glasses to computer terminals.

These adaptations additionally contextualized the characters and themes with reference to Contemporary sensibilities. For example, Ritchie’s Holmes, while originally a relatively restrained detective specializing in solving puzzles created by others, becomes a swaggering, almost superheroic Holmes animated by playful bravado. The BBC television version of *Sherlock* contextually emphasizes emotional discovery and social awkwardness, often facilitated by Watson. Watson himself transforms from loyal sidekick into an action capable partner on film and a conarrator and blogger on television, naturally reflecting current sensibilities concerning agency and gender role differentiation. Both adaptations offer new themes, for instance, cybercrime, and psychological trauma placed in context unimaginable for Doyle but woven into his framework. Nevertheless, in every version, the basic formula of mystery, logical investigation and the restoration of order remains, clearly showing Holmes’s incredible adaptability as well as the endurance of the detective text.

In conclusion, the findings of this comparative study demonstrate that detective fiction continues to develop by reforming its conventions from one generation to another. Sherlock Holmes remains a living icon in part because his figure can be continuously reimagined. Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories provide a narrative form that contemporary adaptations honor and adjust. The Guy Ritchie films

General Conclusion

and the BBC *Sherlock* series illustrate how cultural context, technological change, and shifting audience expectations reshape detective narratives over time. More importantly, these adaptations reinforce the popular belief that Holmes, literature's world's greatest detective, is relevant to contemporary mystery writing. As Hayes (2016) argues, Holmes's enduring popularity means that each new screen portrayal extends the life of the character. Detective fiction remains socially significant because it combines the enduring cognitive act of solving a mystery with contemporary reflections on order and justice. Even in the digital age, text and screen audiences are drawn to Holmes's example of reason triumphing over chaos, ensuring that Sherlock Holmes and the detective genre will continue to socially engage and captivate readers and viewers alike.

In sum, this comparative analysis directly addresses the research questions posed at the outset. First, it demonstrates that the investigative techniques and character portrayals established in Doyle's Victorian stories have evolved significantly in Ritchie's films and the BBC's *Sherlock*, adapting Holmes's methods to suit modern cinematic styles and technological tools. Second, it shows that the detective genre itself has developed in response to sociocultural and technological changes, absorbing themes like cybercrime, psychological trauma, and surveillance, while still preserving its traditional emphasis on deductive reasoning and moral order. Finally, this study reveals that Victorian and twenty-first-century settings shape the adaptations distinctly, affecting Holmes's investigative practice and relationships with Watson and his antagonists. Together, these findings confirm that Sherlock Holmes endures as a flexible, resonant figure who both anchors and revitalizes the prestige of detective fiction across time.

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