

In his first literary outing, *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), Sherlock Holmes details his ‘method of deduction’, at the heart of which is a characteristic ability to comprehensibly ‘see’: as he puts it, ‘observation with me is second nature’ (23). Indeed, in the body of the text (as in so many of the Holmesian classics), the references to the visual abound, from the descriptions of Holmes’s ‘perceptive faculties’ and ‘powers of analysis’, to the ‘gazing’ at the crime scene, and even in the ‘eye of the law’ (Conan Doyle 28, 25, 27, 38). Conan Doyle’s own training in ophthalmology, and his work alongside Dr Arthur Vernon Ford (chief eye surgeon at the Portsmouth Eye Hospital) (Willis 167), appears to have contributed to the conflation of the author’s and detective’s methods. While this is of interest, in and of itself, more critical is the way in which this stylistic detail, which at first was largely ignored by adaptation in favour of the sketching of character and careful crafting of the detective plot, has returned to the centre of the most recent adaptations.

In reinforcing notions of ocular significance, the BBC’s *Sherlock* (Paul McGuigan et al, 2010- ), for instance, has aligned postmodern visual ephemera with current discussions around political and ideological issues such as state surveillance, image corruption, data sharing, and personal privacy. This article examines the ways in which nineteenth-century Sherlock Holmes’s obsessive observations, and Conan Doyle’s emphasis on the seen and unseen, have resurfaced in contemporary adaptation, suggesting that this core reliance on visual data locates retellings of the Holmes canon within what Garrett Stewart and other film critics have established as a new ‘surveillance genre’ (5). In doing so, this article will explore the ways in which the eye is used intertextually to chart a direct lineage with Conan Doyle’s texts, symbolically as a canonical cue for the traditional (and forensic) science of deduction, and aesthetically, by offering a commentary on contemporary anxieties in our image-obsessed society.

In the space of eight years, several intertextual revisions of the Holmes canon have appeared on British television screens and in cinema. Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss’s much-discussed series *Sherlock* is an archetype of quality television drama. The series’ high-technology, cutting-edge visual displays combine with the reproduction of some of the original short stories and novels (if largely in spirit), while adding modern twists, intertextual pastiche,

and a formidable pair of actors in Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman. The Warner Brothers' franchise of (at this moment only two but with rumours of a third) *Sherlock Holmes* films (Guy Ritchie, 2009 and 2011) trace an equally postmodern construction of the lead, albeit against an edgy, Victorian steampunk backdrop. Faring, perhaps, less well with critics, the films – when taken as the high-octane, yet verbose action typified by lead Robert Downey Junior's usual style – are popular with viewers, and offer, like *Sherlock*, a modern revision for a new audience. Alongside these more clear-cut Conan Doyle adaptations, rest two further versions of the Holmes canon: Bill Condon's *Mr Holmes* (2015) (based on Mitch Cullin's novel *A Slight Trick of the Mind* (2005)) and Stuart Orme's *Arthur and George* (also 2015 and adapted from Julian Barnes's factual-historical novel of the same title (2005)). Both align with the popular trend for literary biopic that saw also Chris Noonan's *Miss Potter* (2006) and John Lee Hancock's *Saving Mr Banks* (2013) achieve success. While this article takes *Sherlock* as its main focus, it is worth bearing in mind this context of multiple contemporary British adaptations.

'Re-imagining' is, perhaps, the most suitable term for these new interpretations of Conan Doyle's stories. While Carlen Lavigne, Lynnette Porter, and Tom Steward (all 2012) frame the BBC series as a straight-forward reworking, Matt Hills argues that the 'heretical fidelity' and the strong authorial role of Gatiss and Moffat define *Sherlock* (Hills 324), making it 'at best an extremely loose adaptation' (ibid) (or what Christina Lee has referred to as a 'hypertextual, multi-mediated construction' (179)). Likewise, Ritchie's films deliberately make use of the iconography of Holmes over the detail; preserving elements that propel the narrative (particularly characters such as Irene Adler and Professor Moriarty) yet relocating the plot within more widely understood historical contexts (following in the footsteps of earlier adaptations). These versions are thus postmodern intertextualities rather than straightforward retellings, which paved the way for subsequent – and concurrent – representations. Indeed, as Porter notes, in 2015 the market had room for both *Sherlock's* Christmas special ('The Abominable Bride') and *Mr Holmes* to make \$38 and \$28 million respectively (Porter, n.p).

In the adoption of fictional historicism, *Mr Holmes* and *Arthur and George* offer conflated renditions of the character and author – a method that Ashley Polasek similarly

identifies in the conceptualisation of David Shore's *House M.D.* (2004-2012) (386). Both fit alongside other recent Holmes adaptations in the way that the embedded references to the visual become essential to the narrative. In this way, recent adaptation makes many subtle allusions to the text through references to looking, seeing, and observing, alongside which ocular symbolism draws attention to Holmes's defining characteristic: his uncanny and machine-like capabilities as 'the most perfect [...] observing machine the world has ever seen' (Conan Doyle 429). Re-energising an emphasis on the optical thus works in two ways: in acting as an emblem for fidelity (conducting an 'essence' of Holmes), whilst epitomising contemporary culture for a twenty-first-century audience.

### **The embodied eye**

At its most obvious, the recent canon makes use of the iconography of the eye to embody Sherlock Holmes's methods. In the same way that 'A Scandal in Bohemia' features extensive dialogue dissecting the variable observational abilities of Holmes and Watson ('You see, but you do not observe', 'You have observed. And yet you have not seen', and 'They do not know how to look' (Conan Doyle 431, 442)), in *Arthur and George*, the first meeting between the two eponymous characters begins with Arthur Conan Doyle diagnosing George Edalji's myopia and astigmatism ('Episode 1'). Immediately Conan Doyle's expertise as an ophthalmologist takes centre stage, with his conviction in Edalji's innocence resting on his belief that the 'ripper' could not have maimed his equine victims without clear sight. In a similar way, the opening scene of the first episode of *Sherlock* features a close-up of Dr John Watson's eye flickering awake during a series of flashbacks of warfare in Afghanistan ('A Study in Pink'). These intimate eye-shots reappear throughout the episode, connecting Watson with the victims and their families (whose eyes are shown tremulous with fear or with tears welling up).

This impression of the eye – usually John's – as a conduit of emotional vulnerability recurs across *Sherlock* more broadly. While Stephen Greer has discussed the scenes in 'A Scandal in Belgravia' and 'The Great Game', in which we watch John watching Sherlock (64),

the shift in perspective from the narration of Dr Watson to the panoptic view of the camera has inverted Watson's watchful observations of Holmes's eyes into an intrusive, emotional reading of his own gaze. Where in the stories, Dr Watson relays frequent descriptions of Sherlock Holmes's eyes as 'keen' (Conan Doyle 905), 'sharp and piercing' (19), 'glistening' (103) or 'vacant [and] lacklustre' (25), in *Sherlock*, we see an inversion of this: the audience's gaze is directed into John's eyes rather than seeing through them. For instance, the camera zooms in while a tearful John stands at Sherlock's graveside in 'The Empty Hearse', Charles Magnussen provokes John by flicking his eye in 'His Last Vow', and in 'The Lying Detective', following Mary's death, and while talking to his new therapist, the screen centres on John's welling tears. In contrast, Sherlock's mechanical vision is undisturbed by emotion (except as an act of insincerity in 'His Last Vow'). Close shots of Sherlock's eyes occur instead at moments of comprehension; rather than the fragility seen in the victims or his friends, his eyes open forcefully (for example, in the denouement of 'Empty Hearse'). In reinforcing this focus on the eye through the camera, like *Arthur and George*, *Sherlock* encourages the audience to be receptive to this metaphor for intertextuality, making sight a key feature of its claim to fidelity.

Gattis and Moffat are demonstrating their understanding of Conan Doyle's original stories, in which all of the principal figures achieve emotional depth through ocular details. Clients are embellished with 'a sardonic eye', 'small fat-encircled eyes', 'wonderfully sharp and penetrating grey eyes', and 'bright eyes' (Conan Doyle 446, 449, 479), while Dr Watson relays Sherlock Holmes's mood through references to his 'kindly eye', his 'eyes [that] sparkled', or his 'rather startled gaze' (430, 432, 446). Clearly, Conan Doyle's professional interest in a visual discourse, and his skilled observations of the eyes, in particular, shaped the way in which he drew character. But stories such as *A Study in Scarlet* also demonstrate that this is specific to interactions involving Sherlock Holmes; in the chapters narrating the backstory in Utah, there is very little use of this attention to ocular detail.

This intertextual materiality of the eye (reinforced symbolically in the opening credits of *Sherlock* with iconic stills of the London 'Eye') is emphasized in dialogue that makes principal the act of seeing. As Sherlock stands over the first victim in 'A Study in Pink', he takes out his magnifying glass (at a moment when the camera pans to his point of view) and

states: ‘Look at her, really look!’ This comment initiates what similarly becomes a recurring theme in Gatiss and Moffats’ dialogue, with Sherlock often uttering lines such as: ‘Don’t you see?’, ‘Can you see?’, ‘Do you see?’ and ‘You do see. You just don’t observe’ (‘Study in Pink’ and ‘Great Game’). This feature is playfully alluded to in ‘The Six Thatchers’ when Sherlock begins a typical lecture with ‘Watson, you see but do not observe’, chastising, in fact, baby Rosamund (the give-away is in the name – Watson, not John). John, on the other hand, demonstrates his deductive inferiority in ‘The Great Game’ through his unsure: ‘I see. No, I don’t. What am I seeing?’ So too, early in Ritchie’s first film, Holmes saves Watson<sup>1</sup> from impalement on a wire-thin glass rapier and in their ensuing conversation we see a reiteration of the crucial Holmesian method:

SHERLOCK HOLMES: Observe.

DR WATSON: How did you see that?

SHERLOCK HOLMES: Because I was looking for it (Guy Ritchie, 2009).

These patterns of dialogue are a simplification of the lectures the literary Sherlock Holmes gives Dr Watson; for example, in *The Sign of the Four* (1890), he starts: ‘What seems strange to you is only so because you do not follow my train of thought or observe the small facts upon which large inferences may depend’ (Conan Doyle 101).

By ‘A Scandal in Belgravia’ (*Sherlock*, series 2), the tense verbal interplay between Irene Adler and Sherlock is conducted along what are now characteristic lines of sight. Adler quips: ‘I think [John] knows exactly where to look’, in reference to her nudity – the irony of which is evident in her use of her body measurements as the safe code. It is in Adler’s gaze that Sherlock can identify the location of this safe by setting off the fire alarm: her gaze (gendered by the reference to Conan Doyle’s example of a ‘mother look[ing] towards her child’), inadvertently directs Sherlock to that which she is trying to conceal. And yet, here the trope of the ocular is taking on greater significance than in the stories themselves. In the original ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’, there is no mention of Adler *looking* to the photograph she is at pains to hide. Instead, Sherlock Holmes refers to a woman’s ‘instinct [...] to *rush* to the thing which

she values most [...] a married woman *grabs* at her baby; an unmarried one *reaches* for her jewel-box' (Conan Doyle 445). While re-inventing the narrative (to include a dominatrix and a smart phone) risks alienating readers of the original, dialogue that seemingly rewards the intertextual reader draws the adaptation closer to the text, to the point at which repetitive and exaggerated aspects of the original can reinforce a perception of authenticity. In the same way that the iconic pipe and deerstalker came to characterise the earliest screen adaptations, the ophthalmic discourse has become a new point of familiarity. Of note, is that this emphasis on the visual in dialogue and symbolism is not a feature of adaptations from the 80s and 90s: this is something new.

This combination of the, now unmarried, Adler's seductive tone with the contemporary feel of the reimagined visual discourse of the Victorian text offers, then, this heretical fidelity, giving both authority to the producers (as Hills puts it) and performing 'at the top level of [...] subtext' (Gatiss as cited in Hills 35-37):

IRENE ADLER: You were very observant [...]

IRENE ADLER: You know I was wrong about him. He did know where to look [...].

IRENE ADLER: You got that from one look? Definitely the new sexy ('Scandal in Belgravia').

The item now held within the safe – Adler's camera phone – is an additional twist to the notion of seeing and capturing. In acquiring the phone, Sherlock's first action is to hide it, 'where no one will look', before recovering it for x-ray in the lab. The idea of viewing beyond the exterior casing and penetrating the interior of the camera, creates a paradox of the captured images that cannot be seen. In addition, the camera phone adds contemporary urgency to the ethical concerns of a new age of image capture and misuse. Rather than a 'cabinet' photograph of a pair of young lovers, as in 'A Scandal in Bohemia', the camera phone, whilst potentially implicating a royal family member in this instance, is a chilling symbol of the ease of everyday communications violations.

Indeed, the cabinet photograph itself comes to embody a much wider range of issues than first glance suggests. There is something intrinsic to the discussions of authenticity and

legality in the deliberately posed photograph, taken with permission of the subjects (and paid for), and the capturing of illicit images, regardless of the uses made of those images later by the blackmailer. In 'A Scandal in Bohemia' there are, in fact, two images circulated – the original object of extortion and the replacement that Adler gives Sherlock Holmes when she escapes. Both of these images are intended to memorialise; both are postured, no mean feat in the age of slow photographic processes. In 'Belgravia', Irene Adler takes illegal images of unsuspecting victims, employing paparazzi-style investigators to follow her quarry. The images are private, for her consumption only and as a weapon in her blackmailer's arson. There is no equivalent of the photograph given to Sherlock Holmes, but rather a continued dialogue of text communications. In this sense, the image is replaced with the potential for sharing data, even though that data is revealed as highly corruptible. The trope of the image is simultaneously promoted beyond its original capacity in the stories, and updated to accentuate the complex moral, social, and legal implications of cutting-edge visual technologies.

### **Screening deduction**

The shift from posed photograph to captured image symbolises many of the changes in the screening of deduction in contemporary adaptation. In the stories, Dr Watson acts as a metaphorical photographer, giving (with consent) the reader an insight into events, and narrating Sherlock Holmes's behaviour – drawing his mood, his response, and his moments of enlightenment. Screening Holmes, however, places the audience in the position of voyeur; no longer deliberately mediated by the authorial Watson, we are intruding upon Holmes's application of the science of deduction – in recognition of this, occasionally Sherlock looks directly to the camera, breaking the fourth wall to acknowledge his awareness of the viewer's presence. The frequent references that Dr Watson makes, in particular, to Sherlock Holmes's gaze in the text have become a crucial tool for relaying information about the essential skills of deduction on screen. The camera thus replicates Watson's close readings of Holmes's eyes whilst simultaneously embodying concerns about the digital intrusion, which are separate and

morally distinct from the prurience of Sherlock Holmes himself – whose clients’ pleas justify his involvement.

In some ways this is merely technical; while Conan Doyle’s original character used the minutia of an individual’s appearance to allow for a ‘reading’ that turned visual signifiers into traceable clues, adaptation must convert this, as Greer puts it, into a ‘readability that is dominated by the immediacy of the visual’ (57). In part, as Brendan Riley argues, this is due to the pace of camera over textual description. Where, in the stories, Conan Doyle must describe the signifiers as Sherlock Holmes offers his deductions, television and film ‘make [...] the ordinary evocative’; thus, the audience can already see every detail of each character whilst the camera rather than Dr Watson must draw emphasis (Riley 913). Or, as in the case of Ritchie’s films, Holmes can narrate his own deductions, guiding the viewer towards his ability to engage in both fast-paced action and complex physical deductions:

HOLMES [VOICE OVER]: Head cocked to the left. Partial deafness in ear. First point of attack. Two. Throat. Paralyse vocal cords. Stop screaming. Three. Got to be heavy drinker. Floating rib to the liver. Four. Finally, drag the left leg. Fist the patella. Summary prognosis: Conscious in 90 seconds. Martial efficiency, quarter of an hour. Full faculty recovery, unlikely (Ritchie 2009).

What appears as a three-dimensional, fast-paced audio and visual montage, is actually a method of verbal annotation comparable to Watson’s position as companion/scribe in the text.

In *Sherlock*, on the other hand, there is a superimposition of text, image, and video onto character detail, in an act of what Riley calls ‘electracy’ – a demonstration of a new era of human communications in which we view and transmit multiple media simultaneously and infinitely (913). This diegetic tool is at the heart of *Sherlock* and one of its core modernising practices. Overlaying the screen with information as it is received (via text, John’s blog, or through Sherlock’s retrieval of his own memory), evokes the relentless stimulation of modern life. Even in the partially Victorian setting of ‘The Abominable Bride’, this innovation continues with newspaper clippings and telegrams appearing over the action. Particularly



iconic, in the reinforcement of this electracry is the mobile phone; in the visualisation of the receiving and sending of texts, digital camera phone images, and, later, the use of video conferencing, Apple's FaceTime and mobile Skype, *Sherlock* carefully mimics current media practices by replacing the narrated material with, in many instances, the camera phone itself. Indeed, Irene Adler's cabinet photograph becoming a memory card is a highly symbolic marker of this shift: from the posed, to the captured, the letter to the text, and the interview with the video call.

Alongside these technological innovations, lighting and reflective tricks embed within *Sherlock* – more so than the other adaptations under discussion – a depiction of the bombardment of complex visual stimuli. Focusing on Sherlock's face whilst he reads computer screens (see the 'Hounds of Baskerville') and the inverted reflection of the screen allows for the synchronization of fast-paced data retrieval by the audience and on-screen character. Recurrent shots of night-time driving, especially in series one, offer an interplay of mirrored-images upon the movement of street lights and the reflections of shop windows, with the integration of digital text (messages received within the car) reinforcing this multiplicity. Later series make use of mirrors to provide similar layering effects, with Mycroft's office in series four featuring both a full-length mirror (which, in his vanity, he is often standing in front of), while the grates across the top of the room let shadows fall across the scene, distorting the field of sight. Indeed, this type of optical trick is all that Moriarty himself can offer after the 'The Reichenbach Fall'. He becomes, in effect, a digital shadow, spreading fear through the playing of pre-recorded videos and a message in hidden ink (viewed only once Sherlock uses ultraviolet light on the paper ('Lying Detective')). While the audience receives a barrage of optical data, in replication of modern consciousness, they are equally taught to question the validity of what their own eyes relay.<sup>2</sup>

Equally, however, *Sherlock* fulfils contemporary expectations of the crime genre (and indeed, in recognition of the role that Conan Doyle's literary character himself played in its creation) by pursuing the science of deduction to its forensic conclusions. As Ellen Burton Harrington discusses, *Sherlock* places great emphasis on the type of infallible and extreme close reading offered by the tools of forensic science. As she asserts: 'identity can be clearly

construed in the traces and clues interpreted by the scientist-observer, a model that holds true in the twenty-first century forensic science shows as well' (Burton Harrington 371). In this sense, there is a conflation of the observer, scientist, and detective, that has been cultivated through the character of Sherlock Holmes and which now is replicated in the iconography of a wide range of cultural texts. Crime shows such as *CSI* (CBS, 2000-2015) rely as much on the generic association between Sherlock Holmes and his magnifying glass, as *Sherlock* does on the use of a microscope to indicate the forensic. Both images reinforce the position of the eye, and make essential the relationship between seeing and knowing. The opening credits of series fourteen of the original *CSI*, for instance, are a compilation of images featuring spectacles, camera lenses, microscopes, and looking glasses.

In many ways, embedding forensic processes underpins two key points: first, it acknowledges both the specificity of Sherlock Holmes within the origins of processes such as fingerprinting and early pathology, and the wider scientific methods of the great sleuth. Second, and as David Kirby suggests, forensic science 'fits the need for visual splendour' in contemporary television (93). Audiences expect to see complex pathological procedures on screen, and, as such, even television shows such as the BBC's *Death in Paradise* (2011- ) that began as a nostalgic return to the 'locked-door' mysteries of the Golden Age, reintroduce contemporary methods of forensic science. The portrayal of a closely-viewed pipette dropping liquid onto an unidentifiable, dark-red fluid on a slide, followed by a close zoom of a microscopic chemical reaction in the opening credits of *Sherlock* fulfils audience expectations of the wider genre, whilst situating the series within Holmesian canon, and deconstructing the essence of observation itself. It is ironic, then, that while *Sherlock* makes the most of the "special sight" which forensic scientists possess and which television specialises in visualising' (Kirby 96), the series rests on screening 'unseeable' crimes and criminals.

Jeff the cabbie's murders, as the press conference early in the first episode ('Study in Pink') establishes, are technically suicides; in a parody of the classic police line 'there is nothing to see here', there is no technical crime to witness. In the same manner, 'The Hounds of Baskerville' offers *nothing* to see (with the use of a hallucinogen offering an optical illusion). Like the original stories, and as a method of testing Sherlock's deductive skills, many of the

cases rest on the technicalities of what makes a crime. More importantly, the series makes central the concept that as an all-seeing machine (as he puts it: ‘I didn’t know. I *saw*’ (‘Study in Pink’)), Sherlock’s various antithesis must reside within the realm of the unseen. Jeff the cabbie, for instance, says: ‘No one ever thinks about the cabbie. It’s like we’re invisible’ (‘Study in Pink’). As in a *Study in Scarlet*, where the cabdriver is able to coerce his victim because of his inconspicuous status, Sherlock and John see Jeff on a number of occasions across the episode, but remain unaware of their murderer’s identity. In a similar way, Culverton Smith, in ‘The Lying Detective’, calls ‘plain sight’ the ‘safest place to hide’. Modern fears, the series asserts, rest on the dangerous anonymity of an individual with a drive to kill and a method of remaining unseen – a comment, of course, on the recent investigations of celebrity figures such as Jimmy Savile.

In a similar fashion, as the subtitle of the second of Ritchie’s films suggests (*A Game of Shadows*), the ‘evil’ scheme of Professor Moriarty rests on an unseen act – as Stephen Fry’s Mycroft says: ‘I believe you but where is your evidence?’ Moriarty’s manipulation of world powers into a war in which he owns the weapons and the bandages, relies on a single assassin whose face has been altered. His claims that nothing can be done to stop him rest on the notion that this is a war that each nation subconsciously desires. Just like Culverton Smith in *Sherlock*, Professor Moriarty’s public (and self-publicising) position as a famous mathematician protect him from unsavoury allegations. Unable to convict Moriarty of any ‘seen’ crime, Holmes’s only method of justice is self-sacrifice. At the Reichenbach Falls, and watched by a stricken Watson, Holmes’s eyes remain closed, whilst Moriarty’s are wide open. Of critical importance, here, is that Watson sees the pair fall from the Falls; indeed a feature of *Sherlock* and *Sherlock Holmes* is that (unlike in the short story) there must be a viable witness to the death of the hero. By comparison, in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1985), ‘The Final Problem’ follows the narrative structure of the original, with the camera following Dr Watson’s arrival after the fact, rather than the crucial moment at the Falls. Contemporary audiences are too aware of the ending of the story, and too sceptical of visual illusions to accept anything less than witnessing Sherlock Holmes’s death (or, in the case of *Sherlock*, witnessing John’s reaction to seeing his friend fall). It is the suggestive clues that are teased out of the final scenes that instead tantalise

the viewer; unlike the reader of Conan Doyle's story, who is told that the detective, in fact, never fell, twenty-first century audiences want a greater observatory challenge – to understand the sleight of hand that makes it possible to see the impossible.

At the same time that the incident at the Reichenbach Falls is complicated by modern adaptation, other visual tricks are downplayed. Other than the contrived play acting of Benedict Cumberbatch in a dog collar, or with a pair of glasses and a pen-drawn moustache as a waiter, and Downey Jr's feigned and pantomimed drag-act, there is little serious attempt by Sherlock Holmes to remain unseen (see also Poore 2017). As Clare Douglass Little suggests, at one point, Ritchie opts for futuristic textile camouflage, rather than following Sidney Paget's 'depict[ion of] a Holmes so masterful at disguising his true identity' that he can 'become a different person entirely' (n.p.). Taking Jeremy Brett's portrayal of Holmes-as-plumber in *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes* (1993) as an example, we can understand the ways in which twenty-first century adaptations prefer to maintain the aesthetic charisma of the lead. Brett's immersion when he performs as a working-class labourer is, in many ways, focused less on his character's ego and more on his mastery of disguise, just as in the short story about 'Charles Augustus Milverton'. When Sherlock ingratiates himself with Charles Augustus Magnussen's secretary, his distortion is both more uncanny and less authentic; even John is kept in the dark as to Sherlock's sudden change of character. Just as when he presents himself in a dog-collar to Irene Adler, a trick she sees through immediately, Sherlock's ego means he must remain essentially himself. In this, James Moriarty is both his parallel and his superior; like Sherlock, 'Jim' hides within parodies of himself – from the disinterested I.T. guy, to the fearful actor, and the maniacal and theatrical villain – and like Sherlock he performatively plays with his sexuality.

By series four of *Sherlock*, these references to the seen and unseen are brought to an ominous pitch by Sherlock's sister, Eurus, who demonstrates capabilities for true concealment parallel with those of the textual Holmes. In her high-security prison, Eurus taunts Sherlock, calling him the 'the man who sees through everything' (note, a line taken from John's online blog reads: 'Sherlock sees right through everyone and everything in seconds' ('Great Game')). She parrots lines usually uttered by Sherlock himself: 'you see but do not observe', 'look at

me’, ‘You can’t see it, can you’ (‘Final Problem’). In this final episode of series four (and potentially of *Sherlock* itself), Sherlock is undone by his visual hubris – in reading her signifiers, he misses the clear glass pane that should be separating them: ‘the man who doesn’t notice when there’s nothing to see through’, Eurus taunts (‘Final Problem’). This further heightens Eurus’s other victories over Sherlock – in exactly the same way he has already failed to see through the two disguises she has used in his presence, both of which involve wearing glasses (the first, as Faith Smith, in a chunky, modern design, and the second, as John’s middle-aged therapist, rimless and secretarial). Crucially, it is not only the detective who has been taken in by these illusions – the moment at which Sherlock realises that there are two Faiths is mirrored in the audience’s recognition of the same fact.

Indeed, in her portrayal of Eurus (who removes both her glasses and contact lenses during her denouement in front of John), Sian Brooke channels other killers hidden in plain sight. Even within *Sherlock* itself, she is not the only character to use this tactic (see also the wedding photographer, referred to at one point as ‘the invisible man’ in ‘Sign of Three’). There is also a gendered dynamic to Eurus’s style, foreshadowed early in series four with the death of Mary at the hands of secretary Vivian Norbury. A stereotypically clerical ‘nobody’, Vivian is in the background of nearly every shot, even in the opening scene where Sherlock addresses her directly. By the end, with her face in the shadows, Sherlock’s ultimate insult is to tell her she did very well ‘...for a secretary’ (‘The Six Thatchers’). Vivian’s response that Sherlock has ‘seen right through her’ following his attempt to ‘read’ her ‘inadequa[te]... little life’ gives him false confidence that his approach has disarmed her. The fatal shooting of Mary (with a bullet aimed at Sherlock himself) is Vivian’s final surprise, casting a warning about Sherlock’s weakness at misreading anonymity for harmlessness (note: Mary picks up on this issue much earlier in the episode when she knowingly comments that receptionists ‘know everything’). Full of remorse, he tells Mrs Hudson that she should remind him of ‘Norbury’ any time he is ‘becoming a bit full of [him]self’.

Both Eurus Holmes and Vivian Norbury additionally build upon a wider trope in the genre. In the ITV adaptation of Agatha Christie’s *After the Funeral* (1953), as an example, Monica Dolan plays Miss Gilchrist, the underappreciated live-in companion of Cora

Abernethie. Having killed Cora, and taken her place at a family funeral, Dolan's chilling representation of the unhinged murderer rests, as it does in Christie's novel, on the assumption that 'one doesn't bother to look at a mere companion help' ('After the Funeral', 2006). Just as Vivian uses her ill-gotten gains to buy a 'nice cottage' in Cornwall, all Miss Gilchrist wants is a small tearoom, The Willow Tree. For all three, a quick dismissal based on gender and position creates a powerful sense of vengeance and a perfect screen – as Eurus comments: 'Amazing the times a man doesn't really look at your face' ('Final Problem'). The statements by Vivian, Miss Gilchrist, and Eurus give weight to an interpretation of the male gaze that inverts Irene Adler's nude power-play and her assumptions about methods of gaining Sherlock's attention while rendering herself unreadable. These details additionally allow the contemporary rewritings to participate in a generic intertextuality, as well as conforming to Sherlock's prophecy about the 'seemingly insignificant' actions that underpin complex criminal plots ('Empty Hearse').

Sherlock, on the other hand, faces the challenge of remaining effective whilst resisting a fierce publicity. Unlike spinster-detectives such as Christie's Miss Marple and Patricia Wentworth's Miss Silver who, as Kathy Mezei argues, similarly 'represent the dialectic between [...] omniscience and anonymity' (104), Sherlock is pressured into media celebrity. As he puts it: 'I'm a private detective, the last thing I need is a public image' ('Scandal in Belgravia'). This intrusion of the media, and the widespread visibility of Sherlock Holmes, is a feature made prominent in all four of the latest adaptations. In *Sherlock*, the media obsession with photographing Sherlock wearing the deerstalker hat (ironically first used, as Allan Johnson highlights, as a method of 'concealment' (119)), makes clear his eminence as a public figure, just as in *Mr Holmes*, the image in the newspapers of the 'hat and the pipe' – fictional embellishments of Dr Watson's – confuse clients and suspects alike. Sergeant Upton, in *Arthur and George*, mockingly refers to Arthur Conan Doyle as Sherlock Holmes before dismissing him as 'only exist[ing] in stories' ('Episode 2'). In sunglasses and a fedora, Downey Jr is immortalised not in print but as a sketch in *A Game of Shadows*, symbolising the conflation of media attention and fashion icon (see Johnson). The detective has become not only 'all-seeing'; he is now crucially emblematic of the 'all-seen' modern celebrity.

## Surveillance

In many ways, *Sherlock* measures the development of image technology between 2010 and the present day: from the embedding of text and social media feeds on screen in series one, to the split-screen display of action and FaceTime in the latest series, it stays at the cutting edge of image ephemera. The use of a laptop and webcam in ‘A Scandal in Belgravia’ to allow Sherlock to ‘see’ the site where the backpacker is killed, is already dated by series four where the iPhone replaces the cumbersome computer. This progressive technological strand situates *Sherlock* both within the established canon in which, as Benjamin Poore suggests, Sherlock Holmes is an ‘early adopter’ of ‘modern gadgetry’ (165), as well as a contemporary discourse of the captured image. As the camera phone in ‘A Scandal in Belgravia’ signifies, the storage of visual data is increasingly pertinent in a society where both public and private sources of digital photography/videography are renegotiating concepts of voyeurism, privacy, and security. Where these reflections of our ‘extreme visual literacy’ (Stein and Busse 11) are relevant and engaging for modern audiences, they are also conscious reminders that image data carries with it the implication of threat.

Looking back to the Victorian hero, Sherlock Holmes, who deals so adeptly with images, reassures modern audiences that the existence of a digital stockpile is no bad thing: indeed, the mental capturing and storing of manifold signs and symbols lies at the core of his powers. As Steenberg and Tasker put it, shows that rely on surveillance technologies – like *24* (Robert Cochran and Joel Surnow, 2001-2010) – remind us that ‘good people are watching’ (135). Sherlock Holmes is fundamentally a human embodiment of positive surveillance even in his first incarnation – what Michael Plakotaris calls a ‘celebrat[ion]’ of the ‘triumph of the surveillance society’ (143). Long before the impervious gaze of urban CCTV, in ‘A Case of Identity’, Holmes talks of wanting to ‘fly out of [the] window [...] hover over this great city, gently remove the roofs and peep in at the queer things that are going on’ (Conan Doyle 468). In a more limited realisation of this desire, Watson describes Holmes’s practice of ‘gazing down into the dull neutral-tinted London street’ (470) as a prospective client arrives in some

distress, ready to be helped by the all-seeing Holmes. In addition, *Sherlock* makes itself explicitly concurrent with parliamentary discussions around so-called ‘Snooper’s Charters’ – referred to in the diegetic radio and television coverage of an Anti-Terrorist Bill in ‘The Empty Hearse’ – as well as concern over bugged smart devices in our homes, and fear of international agencies breaching our privacy. New adaptations of the character offer a narrative about the Orwellian eye of ‘Big Brother’ (both metaphorically and literally, in governmental Mycroft Holmes) that is, in turns, intimidating, reassuring, and playful. While these are essential contemporary issues, they do expand on and update the frequent references made in the short stories to the ‘eye of the law’ (38), an edict which is firmly legitimised in Sherlock Holmes’s coalition with these forces (and against which acts are justified – such as breaking and entering – only in the pursuit of justice).

In engaging with the new surveillance society, *Sherlock* technologizes aspects of its spatial awareness, rendering it closer to science fiction film than crime drama. Nick Jones discusses the way in which the POV in *Robocop* (José Padilha, 2014) – a film which he talks about as being typical of surveillance in sci-fi – ‘maps and annotates space’ (Jones 20). This method of adding analysis and emphasis is in evidence across *Sherlock*, both in the overlay of text, and the mimicked touch-screen swipe used to shift the audience’s view of landscapes (see, as an example, the visual recreation of Faith Smith’s flat in ‘Lying Detective’). Scenes such as the examination of a corpse at the side of the Thames in ‘The Great Game’ similarly witness the combination of mapping and annotation. Sherlock simultaneously searches through Interpol’s missing/most wanted for a place of origin for the victim (with diegetic text displaying the results) while lamenting the loss of readable ‘data’ eroded from the body.

In a similar way, the spatial construction of Sherlock’s ‘mind palace’ is a multifaceted and, at times, touch sensitive digital montage of ‘saved’ or ‘stored’ image and text data that is ‘mapped’ onto geographical features. As Stein and Busse suggest, it is this ‘dependence on the protocol of search and filter in [Sherlock’s] deductive processes’ that demonstrate the way in which ‘digital logics’ have become ‘personal logics’ (11). For instance, the recognition of Lord Moran from CCTV footage involves a fast-paced tableau of maps, text, images, memories, and re-enactments, all of which are visualized against the backdrop of Sherlock’s opening and



closing eyes ('Empty Hearse'). The mind palace, in this sense, is technologized both in the way that it represents the storage of information and in the visual practices used to map and annotate the retrieval of that material, that mimic the processes of digital surveillance.

If Sherlock performs as a central monitoring and recovery system, his brother's ability to record and manipulate data is even more impressive. Early in series one, the audience witnesses a demonstration of governmental surveillance, when Mycroft makes use of his considerable power to coerce Watson into meeting through the manipulation of CCTV cameras ('Study in Pink'). Mycroft's comment that 'they' – whichever unspoken agency he is supposed to represent – 'upgrade their surveillance [to] active' demonstrates the sophistication of his reconnaissance abilities. Whilst his actions until this point should suggest the endangerment to the privacy of the detecting duo, Mycroft's exploits as voyeur are not, despite his cloak-and-dagger style, taken as a serious threat in *Sherlock*. In this way, as Jones discusses in reference to sci-fi film discourse, the inclusion of surveillance practices 'makes safe existing and developing methods of panoptican spatial monitoring' (3). State surveillance, in the context of *Sherlock*, is an embodiment of big brotherly concern and scrutiny. There are, however, questions raised about contemporary digital surveillance culture: while there is nothing to fear from 'Big Brother', *Sherlock* does identify the potential threat of malign and criminal censoring.

In this, *Sherlock* presents a complex relationship with its own technological integrity. Indeed, a clear separation between the three distinct manifestations of surveillance is carefully underscored: Sherlock's panoptic view, Mycroft's 'hijack[ing of] the machinery of the state to look after [his] own family' ('Lying Detective'), and the voyeuristic/evil surveillant are divided along moral lines. The audience is amused and comforted by John and Sherlock's success in tracing Mary's furtive and cunning attempt to 'go off grid' in 'The Six Thatchers' – itself a commentary on the popularity of programmes such as Channel 4's *Hunted* (2015) which pits 'ordinary people' against expert hunters using CCTV, satellite information, digital media, and heat-seeking helicopters. In *Sherlock*, as in *Hunted*, we are both rooting for the escapee (Mary) and impressed by the scope of the observer (John/Sherlock), who, in this instance makes use of a remarkably simple and technological tool to find their quarry – a GPS tracker. Just as

CCTV cameras are often seen as promoting public safety, Sherlock's monitoring of Mary is sold as a necessity in order to keep her safe.

Alternatively, when Moriarty bugs 221B, Sherlock talks of the 'surveillance web closing in' ('Reichenbach Fall'); in a similar fashion, when Charles Magnussen enjoys repeating the video of John's near-death, or Culverton Smith watches Sherlock sleeping, the ghoulishness of their actions add to their immorality ('His Last Vow', 'Lying Detective'). In the latter episode, any tension between the surveillance of Mycroft and his governmental cronies and the maligned voyeurism of the criminal is diffused by Sherlock's response. 'Big Brother is watching you' is a threat dismissed by Sherlock with a flippant grin to a CCTV camera and a governmental operator laughing at the GPS tracking spelling out 'Fuck off' ('Lying Detective'). Like the films that Stewart suggests make up the new 'surveillance genre' (for instance, the Jason Bourne series), this friction is resolved because Sherlock is 'electronically deft and surveillance savvy' (14), and thus capable of outsmarting those who watch, regardless of their intent. Unlike Jason Bourne, Sherlock can alternatively rely on state surveillance when he needs it, modify it when he breaks the law (see 'Six Thatchers' and the doctored recording of Magnussen's murder), and mock it when it suits his purpose.

While governmental observations of Sherlock are thus reassuring for the audience (in times when he may face peril), agency scrutiny of criminal behaviours is less successful. Moriarty's use of a camera phone outside the Tower of London appears chilling precisely because the simple technology outweighs any threat or deterrent effect that the twelve CCTV screens and the armed guards inside should offer (ironically, Moriarty does not even use technology to break in, but relies on human weakness). Passed to a guard beside the security X-ray, the phone evades detection while the tourist-criminal is scanned. Moriarty's message to 'Get Sherlock', written in reverse for the camera, before he shatters the glass surface, demonstrates the playfulness with which he too can perform for the audience ('Reichenbach Fall'). Even with the full video evidence of Moriarty's guilt, his ability to hack the jurors' television screens and identify their 'pressure points' means a 'not-guilty' verdict is recorded. Like Sherlock, Moriarty is media savvy, yet where we are comforted by the state monitoring our detective hero, we receive no such reassurance that recording Moriarty will achieve any

positive outcome. In the same way, Sherlock's recording of Smith's admission of guilt is unusable in court because it counts as a 'honey-trap' operation – in this case, state intervention obstructs the outcome of successful surveillance ('Lying Detective').

Rives-East suggests that, in many ways, the audience are under the 'illusion that they are in control of the post-7/7 British surveillance and law enforcement apparatus, rather than subject to it' (44): indeed, when the courts cannot convict Moriarty, the viewer becomes the advocate for justice. In a typically postmodern illustration, Sherlock and Moriarty find themselves in neighbouring cells in a panoptic prison – the audience capable of seeing both while neither can see each other ('Reichenbach Fall'). The audience as surveillant is then a fourth strand that implies a dynamism in keeping with the online blog that runs concurrently alongside the series, keeping, as Rives-East suggests, the über-detective from potential corruption. In many ways, this advances the argument offered by Randy Lippert and Jolina Scalia; that there is a 'structurally mutual constitutive tether between surveillance technologies and film', which, in substituting the audience for the surveillant, encourages an 'acceptance of [such] technology' (28). At the same time, Sherlock, in his ability to manipulate scrutiny, manages to retain the upper hand; the writers' refusal to give a sensible explanation for how Sherlock faked his death undermines the viewer as all-seeing. We do know that Mycroft, on behalf of the government (for whom Sherlock, in his hiatus has been working as an agent), knows the 'truth' of the Fall. The state, then, knows everything – even where John has booked a reservation for dinner – but we are amused by Mycroft's 'weather eye' ('Empty Hearse'), rather than concerned.

As Lippert and Scalia suggest, the 'surveillant assemblage' in contemporary film (and I would argue, on television) offers a 'normaliz[ation of] the spread and intensification of video surveillance'(27). While the narrative surrounding government agency is personified in Mycroft's attempts at brotherly involvement (and his botched endeavour to keep both Sherlock and Eurus safe), we are reminded also of the importance of careful scrutiny. In 'The Empty Hearse', as an example, the threads of surveillance combine to create a moment of clarity in which Sherlock solves the case (symbolically expressed in the closure and opening of his eyes). The terrorist plot is uncovered by the accumulation of evidence gathered in a number of ways:

Sherlock's homeless network photographing key individuals of importance, Sherlock tracking and mapping these images, and the vigilance of the Underground CCTV operator and train enthusiast, who sees a passenger boarding an underground train and not disembarking at the final stop. Indeed, in this episode more so than any other, Sherlock serves as a symbolic surveillance system more akin to a robotic data storage than a human being; he is as Dr Watson accuses him of in *The Sign of the Four*, 'an automaton – a calculating machine' (105).

Any comfort received through this process of vigilant observation, however, is complicated by the ways in which those under surveillance perform. If the fear of the unseen presents an ominous threat – evidenced through an anonymous serial killer like Jeff, who kills without purpose or ideology – those captured on screen present a certain tangibility. At the same time, criminals like Moriarty and Smith manipulate monitoring to suit their own ends. Indeed, the ominousness of Smith's desire to kill 'anybody' and his urge to declare his crime, rests on his ability to doctor the inbuilt human systems of image capture and storage: the memory. Smith is both a comment on recent exposure of public figures such as Savile, and representative of the unpredictability of the killer who acts at random – for whom killing itself is the reward, and confession is compulsive. In the same way, Moriarty's post-mortem triumph is an extravagant performance facilitated by the recording of images that can cause terror even after his death. In co-opting television screens and media platforms into his digital resurrection, Moriarty can outperform Sherlock's own media presence, forcing his nemesis to battle a visual fiction. While Rives-East discusses the connection between race and terror, Moffat and Gatiss also offer a narrative of the criminal mastermind who is motivated by the theatricality of death, without political, religious, or ideological significance. The camera itself, then provides both a method of reconnaissance and a manner of projection.

## **Conclusion**

The first episode of *Sherlock* is, perhaps, key to the iconography reproduced throughout the series. At one point, Sherlock says to John that the killer they seek is: '[someone] who passes unnoticed wherever they go; who hunts in the middle of a crowd' ('Study in Pink'). This

quotation summarises much of the threat within *Sherlock*, as well as the Warner Brothers' films. Even more critical is the way that the invisible threat builds upon the embedded, persistent, and intertextual reliance on the ocular that frames so much of the original canon. The BBC series, the films, and slightly more distant re-workings such as *Arthur and George* and *Mr Holmes* take their lead from Conan Doyle's stories in their references to the observed and unseen, the noticed and the undetected, the revealed and concealed, and the photographic mind and the captured image. Taken together, these modern re-workings heighten the proliferation of the visual spectacle and multimedia inundation, alongside the fear that we cannot interpret these signifiers in a meaningful way. Just as in the densely populated late-Victorian metropolis, and at a moment where the media revolution was beginning, contemporary audiences turn to Sherlock Holmes to filter these ephemeral images, and make profound and true deductions. And when his enemies co-opt these skills, it is Holmes who can manipulate those same visual clues into a powerful optical illusion of bodily resurrection.

While Sherlock is busy filtering and making sense of our visual culture, the recent television series also raises questions about postmodern consciousness. As Balaku Basu suggests, the 'anti-pluralistic idea that only one interpretation fits the facts' (201), actually serves to undermine the bombardment of stimuli that is supposed to represent endless contemporary stimulation. Reassuring as it may be that Sherlock Holmes can interpret even the most peripheral of symbols simply by observing them, the plotlines increasingly rely on the recording of data as a necessity in order to cope with image overload. As such, Rives-East writes of the centrality of surveillance to *Sherlock* in post 7/7 Britain, and the 'illusion of a benign but all-knowing monitoring force operating in the public's interest' (45) – a feature given a more threatening edge in the latest Bond film, *Spectre* (2015), wherein Andrew Scott (once more the villain) attempts to pervert the data collection of MI5. Sherlock, like James Bond, maintains the line between protective monitoring and corrupt voyeurism, simultaneously out-performing the ineffective police force, and providing a 'last refuge for the desperate, the unloved, the persecuted [...] a final court of appeal for everyone' ('Final Problem'). In the description of '[her] Baker Street boys', Mary offers the detecting duo as the ultimate check on the police, government agencies, and the judiciary (clearly required after Moriarty's ability to

intimidate a jury). In this instance, the audience can self-reassure; they are capable of monitoring the integrity of all systems of justice by observing even the very actions of those who are working to protect them. While placating the audience, however, later series of *Sherlock* warn us that the construction of an opposition between the detective-panoptic and the governmental surveillance network is merely that – an unrealistic divide that underestimates their reliance upon each other. Instead of categorising surveillance culture as either positive (protective) or invasive (suspicious), in its manifold representations of the ‘observing machine’, *Sherlock* invites the audience, at different points, to accept and then to question the ways in which digital image culture permeates society.

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<sup>1</sup> From this point on, and to avoid confusion, Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman will be referred to as they are in *Sherlock* (as Sherlock and John), whilst Robert Downey Jr and Jude Law will be called Holmes and Watson. Arthur Conan Doyle's original characters will retain their full names as Dr Watson and Sherlock Holmes.

<sup>2</sup> In some ways, this replicates the instances where Dr Watson, in the original stories, questions the clarity of his own vision. In 'A Scandal in Bohemia', for instance, Dr Watson is astounded by Sherlock Holmes's deductions,

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exclaiming: 'When I hear you give your reasons [...] the thing always seems to me to be so ridiculously simple that I could easily do it myself, though at each successive instance of your reasoning I am baffled until you explain your process. And yet I believe that my eyes are as good as yours'. Likewise, when Holmes returns in 'The Empty House' Watson cries: 'I can hardly believe my eyes', as he grasps Sherlock Holmes's arm to be sure he is not 'a spirit'.