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1 Introduction

This thesis shows that a queer reading of *Sherlock* is not only feasible but also suggested by the narrative. To achieve a satisfying conclusion, all nine episodes of the show are analysed using two texts written in the field of queer theory and one text written in the field of television theory. In doing this, two questions are answered: How are television codes used to evoke romance between Sherlock and John, and how can the sexual orientations of the main characters be read? The answers to both questions will show that a queer reading is feasible and a queering of Sherlock and John is to be anticipated for one of the upcoming series.

Sexualising the character of Sherlock Holmes is nothing new. As Graham & Garlen (25) point out: "The sexualisation of Sherlock Holmes began almost as soon as the first stories went to print". They give examples of recent adaptations which portray Sherlock Holmes as attractive and end their thought by stating, "[t]oday, Sexy Sherlock is almost a given" (25).

What is also not new is the idea that Sherlock Holmes and John Watson could have a sexual relationship in one form or another. Lavigne (14), giving as reference a blog called *Gay Sherlock Holmes*, writes about "works such as *The Sexual Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (a 1971 novel by Larry Townsend) and *The American Adventures of Surelick Holmes* (a 1975 pornographic film)". Those examples, however, do not put the focus on Holmes and Watson living together and solving crimes and incidentally being in a relationship. Rather, they focus on the erotic and pornographic aspect of the topic, in which cases only play a minor role, if they appear at all.

Holmes has been sexualised in the past and to imagine a sexual relationship between Holmes and Watson is nothing new. Sherlock in *Sherlock* can be called attractive, considering he is played by Benedict Cumberbatch who, for example, was declared the "Sexiest Movie Star of 2013" by *Empire Magazine*. It is also not unusual to imagine a romantic and/or sexual relationship between Sherlock and John in *Sherlock*, as the further discussion will show. Hathaway (221) points out that both characters have an ambiguous sexuality, which supports a queer reading.

As the discussion will show, representation of queer characters has increased over the last decades, but queer characters do not appear on screen as frequently and in such a wide variety of roles as heterosexual characters. Making Sherlock and John a couple on such a high-profile show as *Sherlock* would have an enormous impact on

Western television landscape. *Sherlock* is sold to over 240 territories worldwide¹, and has won four BAFTA's and seven Emmys. Having a queer couple as the main protagonists of such a popular show would be a step in normalising queerness in television. It would also show that queer characters can be portrayed without putting the focus on their queerness. *Sherlock* would still be about John and Sherlock solving crimes, not on the fact that they are queer. So far, the original stories are used to point out that queering their relationship is impossible due to the fact that Holmes and Watson are not a couple in the books.² As the following discussion will show, *Sherlock* has already made so many changes to the books that Sherlock and John becoming a couple cannot be denied by saying they are not a couple in the stories.

This thesis consists of five chapters. The first chapter introduces the theory texts used for the analysis. Homosocial desire and bisexuality are introduced and a line is drawn between the two to show how they are different. It is vital to include bisexuality in a queer reading of *Sherlock* because John Watson can be read as bisexual. The concept of queerbaiting is also explained, which is vital when doing a queer reading of *Sherlock*. Then *Television Culture* by John Fiske is introduced. Fiske's concept of television codes is used to analyse scenes and show how they can be read as implying romance between Sherlock and John.

The next chapter introduces the world of *Sherlock*. It argues that the show is not set in our world, despite the writers claiming it is. Rather, *Sherlock* seems to be set in a neo-Victorian society, considering how people who are not (straight) white males are treated by the narrative. It also focuses on the phenomenon of *Sherlock* and gives examples of how a queer reading is treated badly by the media, but is implied by the writers, which speaks in favour of anticipating a queering of the relationship of Sherlock and John.

Chapters 4 to 6 analyse each series of *Sherlock* in detail. Four elements are considered for the analysis: the relationship between Sherlock and John, homosexual panic, women and family, and the relationship between Sherlock and the villain.

The aim of this thesis is to show that a queer reading of *Sherlock* in general, and of the relationship between Sherlock and John in particular, is not only feasible, but also strongly suggested by the narrative. Therefore, it is possible to argue that Sherlock and John will become a couple in one of the upcoming series.

¹ <http://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/news/bbcw-tops-drama-sales-table/5086195.article>, accessed: 11 May 2015.

² See: <http://sylviatietjens.co.vu/post/64839344985/oh-my-god-do-you-not-realize-that-john-is-fucking>, accessed: 5 May 2015.

2 Background: Theory

As was mentioned in the Introduction, the first chapter is concerned with the theory which will be used in Chapters 4-6 to analyse *Sherlock* from various viewpoints. The main focus here is on queer and television theory.

The first part of this chapter discusses theories presented by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*, as well as the theories authored in Maria San Filippo's book *The B Word: Bisexuality in Contemporary Film and Television*. The first text was chosen because Kosofsky Sedgwick's book does not only focus on men, but also on women and especially the treatment of women in literature, which is also of interest to the discussion at hand. San Filippo's book addresses the issue of why bisexuality is not often present in today's media, let alone in our society at large. However, as will be shown by the analysis in the following chapters, this is not the case for one of the main characters in *Sherlock*, John Watson, who can be read as bisexual.

The second part of this chapter focuses on *Television Culture* by John Fiske. It will present relevant theory to the analysis of *Sherlock*, such as the codes of television. The aim here is to introduce conventions in television which have been present since at least the 80s to depict heterosexual romance and to enable heterosexual readings of texts and then to apply them to *Sherlock* to show how those conventions are used to portray the (arguably homosocial) relationship between Sherlock and John. This raises the question of how homosocial this relationship really is.

2.1 Queer Theory

Berensmeyer (121), in the definition functioning as the backbone to this thesis, writes:

The terms 'queer' and 'queerness' derive from a pejorative term for homosexuals; the neologism 'queering' refers to the critical activity of reading cultural practices considered as 'normal' or 'mainstream' *against the grain*, with the intention to subvert normative essentialism of gender and to change social practices of representing and controlling 'deviant' sexualities.

What Berensmeyer talks about in this definition is what the thesis aims to do. During the next four chapters, it will discuss how *Sherlock* can be read against what is considered mainstream conventions (for example, Sherlock and John cannot fall in love because they are both men) and it will show a queer reading is not only possible but also highly feasible.

The topic of representing queer characters needs to be addressed, especially since this is also something which *Sherlock* points to in almost every episode. Warner (xiii) points out the necessity of positive representation of queer characters in our society.

He argues society does not question the concept of heterosexuality, “[b]ecause the logic of the sexual order is so deeply embedded by now in an indescribably wide range of social institutions, and is embedded in the most standard accounts of the world, [so] queer struggles aim not just at toleration or equal status but at challenging those institutions and accounts.”

He ends his discussion by saying Western society is only now beginning to question heteronormativity and homophobia, but there is much more that needs to be done in order to give queer characters as much room as heterosexual characters.

The argument Warner makes focuses on gender. We live in a world in which heteronormativity, the belief that only the two binary genders (man and woman) should enter into a relationship because it is natural, is still the norm, and this notion is not frequently challenged by powerful institutions, such as the media. *Sherlock*, however, could potentially defy this dominant culture of heterosexuality by having Sherlock and John enter into a romantic relationship in one of the upcoming series.

An issue which needs to be addressed when writing about *Sherlock* is queerbaiting. Queerbaiting is a relatively new term which is often used in connection to *Sherlock*. Kerishma Panigrahi from the City University of New York wrote a paper about this topic, “Queerbaiting in Online Communities: Television, Fandom, and the Politics of Representation”. Queerbaiting means to tease at a queer possibility, to bait a queer audience into watching the show, but then never having two characters enter into a same-sex relationship. The producers and writers want queer people to watch their show for monetary gains and to achieve this, they, as in the case of *Sherlock*, allude to a queer relationship between Sherlock and John in every episode, often making it the punchline of a joke. An article published by *Autostraddle*, an online magazine for queer women, talks about queerbaiting by saying,

[w]hen [teasing a queer possibility is] that deliberate as in the [case] of *Sherlock* [...], there is a distinct feeling that the creators are playing with LGBTQ – and invested-in-LGBTQ-relationships (since the core of the “Johnlock” fanbase is slash-fanfiction-writing straight women) – dollars, but don’t care enough about us that they’d risk actually offending homophobes with explicit queer representation. Actors or writers may insist it’s not homophobic, but there is a distinct feeling that we’re being taken advantage of, that we’re second-class fans who they don’t care if they do a disservice to so as long as we still watch.

In Series 1 and 2 of *Sherlock*, light queerbaiting can be found in every episode, as a later discussion will show. By Series 3, however, when the queer subtext is not pointed to by secondary characters but is inscribed into the narrative and into the interaction between Sherlock and John itself, *Sherlock* enters dangerous territory. As a later

discussion will show, not making Sherlock and John a couple after the events in Series 3 can be read as one of the worst cases of queerbaiting in recent television history.

After this brief introduction to how queer theory it is understood in the context of this paper, the remaining chapter will discuss the three main texts used for the analysis of *Sherlock*.

2.1.1 Male Homosocial Desire

In her book *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses the bonds between men in different literary works from Shakespeare to the early 20th century. Homosocial, according to her, is a word used to describe “social bonds between persons of the same sex [...] it is applied to such activities as ‘male bonding,’ which may, as in our society, be characterized by intense homophobia” (1). The book raises various valuable points for the following analysis, far too many to incorporate all of them in the discussion. Not only does Kosofsky Sedgwick write about simple bonds of friendship between men, but also about male homosexuality, which is vital for this thesis.

For the analysis of *Sherlock*, three chapters will be taken into account. The first one is “Chapter Four: *A Sentimental Journey*: Sexualism and the Citizen of the World”. This chapter discusses the nuclear family, consisting of a father, a mother, and a child, something which is mostly absent in *Sherlock*. The second one is “Chapter Five: Toward the Gothic: Terrorism and Homosexual Panic”. It is important to incorporate the topic of homophobia, something which still is a major issue in our society, into the discussion since it is not an issue in *Sherlock*. The final chapter which will be used in detail is “Chapter Six: Murder Incorporated: *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*”. Kosofsky Sedgwick’s discussion of Hogg’s novel, especially of the brothers George and Robert and the character of Gil-Martin, can be applied when analysing the relationship between Sherlock and Jim Moriarty.

In “Chapter 4”, Kosofsky Sedgwick analyses *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* which was written by Laurence Sterne and published in the second half of the 18th century. The chapter is mostly concerned with the family. In *Sherlock*, the topic of family is almost entirely absent from the narrative, especially the nuclear family consisting of father, mother, and child. The same can be observed when looking at *A Sentimental Journey*. Kosofsky Sedgwick (81) points to the fact that the main character, Yorick, does not have a literal family, at least not one which is mentioned in the novel. It is undeniable that family relations are mentioned in almost every episode of *Sherlock* (Sherlock’s brother Mycroft, for example, has a much bigger role than he has in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s stories), but the audience is not introduced to any

other parents or siblings of the main characters until Series 3. This does not mean familial bonds do not exist in the show; however, they would not be called family in the traditional meaning of the word.

This is the main reason why “Chapter 4” is important for the discussion of *Sherlock*. Kosofsky Sedgwick states in the beginning of the chapter that a “conventional charge against psychoanalytic-like views of the family has been that they are bound by the perspective of the European bourgeoisie and do not extend their view beyond it” (67f.). To understand families as presented in *Sherlock* it is vital that the views of what a family is are extended beyond this European bourgeois perspective, especially considering the possibility that Sherlock and John might form a family in one of the upcoming series, in the sense that they might become spouses and life partners. This constellation would not be considered a family in the traditional sense of the word.

This goes hand in hand with the need of the characters to create a family of their own when their relatives fail to provide them with one. Kosofsky Sedgwick writes about Yorick creating “a three-dimensional family romance, in which any man may be his father, any powerful woman his mother, as soon as they are seen in an intercourse that could be fantasied to have himself as its subject” (77). In *The Sign of Three*, the second episode of Series 3, Sherlock is shown creating exactly such a family for himself, which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

The final important point which is raised by “Chapter Four” is the treatment of women, something which is pointed to over and over again in the course of Kosofsky Sedgwick’s book, and which is also tremendously important when looking at *Sherlock*. “Chapter 4” discusses how “the spectacle of the ruin of a woman” adjusts the differences in power between men (76). This is something which happens over and over in *Sherlock*, since the show features almost 30 named women, but almost all of them suffer from the hands of men (either figuratively or literally), and men reunite or advance their relationships over the ruin of these women.

“Chapter 5” deals with the topic of homophobia, which is almost entirely absent in *Sherlock* even though the topic of Sherlock and John being a couple is raised in almost every episode. The characters making this assumption about the two accept the fact that two men can live together as lovers and partners and they do not make homophobic remarks about it. There is just one incident where a character reacts almost hostile when discovering Sherlock and John could be couple, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

First, the term homophobia needs to be defined. Kosofsky Sedgwick (Introduction note 1) points out that,

[t]he notion of 'homophobia' is itself fraught with difficulties. [...] A more serious problem is that the linking of fear and hatred in the '-phobia' suffix, and in the word's usage, does tend to prejudge the question of the cause of homosexual oppression: it is attributed to fear, as opposed to (for example) a desire for power, privilege, or material goods.

According to Kosofsky Sedgwick (82), the first literary genre to be wary of homosocial bonds is the Gothic. Therefore, homophobia in Western society dates back to the late 17th century. She goes on saying that "the result has been a structural residue of terrorist potential, of *blackmailability*, of Western maleness through the leverage of homophobia" (89).

Homophobia is a device to repress certain people, as becomes obvious when looking at the most important point in "Chapter 5": the idea of homosexual panic which is "the most private, psychologized form in which many twentieth-century western men experience their vulnerability to the social pressure of homophobic blackmail" (89). It is not only a way to control homosexual men, but any man, and every homosocial bond between men can be the subject of this blackmail. It is impossible for men to determine whether they will be subjected to homophobia; they are in danger of becoming a victim as soon as they form a bond with other men (88f.).

Homophobia might not be a common theme in *Sherlock*; homosexual panic, however, is. John, in particular, suffers from it. In the course of the nine episodes, he points out eight times he is not in a relationship with Sherlock and/or not gay, often aggressively, which will be discussed in length in the following chapters, as will the question why he is so scared of this possibility when *Sherlock* seems to be set in a society free of homophobia.

"Chapter 6" analyses the Gothic novel *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* by James Hogg. It tells the story of the brothers George and Robert who are "assigned to class milieux [which shows] a possible triumph of nurture over nature" (Kosofsky Sedgwick 99). The goal in applying Kosofsky Sedgwick's analysis of the novel to *Sherlock* is to emphasise the similarities between Sherlock and his nemesis Jim Moriarty; they appear to be similar in character, but are also in stark contrast to one another. It can be argued that the absence of a John Watson makes Jim Moriarty into the villain of the story rather than the hero, and that Sherlock can only become a hero through the help of his best friend.

As the later discussion will show, Sherlock can be read as the George to Moriarty's Robert, but Gil-Martin can also be read as the Moriarty to Sherlock's Robert. On the one hand, as Kosofsky Sedgwick (102) points out, "Robert [...] hatingly throws himself at the man who seems to be at the fountainhead of male prestige" and, moreover,

Robert fails at desiring women. This is essentially a description which can be applied to Jim Moriarty. On the other hand, “the novel’s strong suggestion is that Gil-Martin in the shape of Robert is the author of much of the carnage; or, psychologizing that, that Gil-Martin performs these acts as a projection of Robert’s unconscious wishes” (105). This is the most important point “Chapter 6” makes for the analysis of the bond between Sherlock and Moriarty.

To sum up, *Between Men* offers three examinations which will be applied to *Sherlock*: the family and, in connection to this, the treatment of women, homophobia, or rather homosexual panic, and the differences between George and Robert and the similarities between Robert and Gil-Martin in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Before analysing the show, however, an equally vital point has to be discussed: bisexuality.

2.1.2 Bisexuality

As was mentioned above, bisexuality could potentially be introduced through *Sherlock* to the media landscape. Bisexuality, in the context of this thesis, is understood as being “sexually attracted to both men and women” (*Oxford Dictionary of English*). So far, this sexual orientation has been almost invisible. In her book *The B Word: Bisexuality in Contemporary Film and Television*, San Filippo points out that bisexuality does not go unnoticed by media scholars, “but they call it by other names: gay, lesbian, homoerotic, homosocial, queer [...] bisexuality remains the orientation that dares not speak its name” (4). Not only is bisexuality not recognised by writers, producers, and media scholars for what it is, it is also downgraded. There is “the belief that bisexuality is ‘just a phase’ or ‘the easy way out,’” (San Filippo 4). San Filippo goes on by stating that monosexuality “is systemically reproduced by pressing social-sexual subjects to conform to either heterosexuality or homosexuality, and by keeping bisexuality (in)visible” (10).

It cannot be overlooked that, over the last decades, representation of queer people in the media has steadily risen. However, this representation is not only often stereotypical and almost caricatural, it also excludes bisexuals almost completely, even demonising this sexual orientation. One example for this is the Showtime show *Queer as Folk* which is about the life of a group of gay men. The show makes a point of giving the men distinct personalities: Brian is the leather-jacket-wearing bad boy associated with James Dean, Emmett is the stereotypical gay man who dresses flamboyantly and almost always waves his hands around when talking. However, the show hardly ever mentions the possibility of a bisexual character, making it seem as if only two orientations exist: heterosexual and homosexual.

When bisexuality is mentioned in television series, it is almost always done with incomprehension in the best case and open hostility in the worst case. An example for this can be found in *Sex and the City*. In the third episode of Season 3, entitled “Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl...”, Carrie goes out with a man who is openly bisexual. When he tells her about his bisexuality, she discusses the subject with her friends in a conversation during which most of them are revealed to be extremely bi-phobic.

CARRIE. The weird thing is, he was so open about it. You know, “Hi, I’m a bisexual” like “Hi, I’m from Colorado” or something.

[...]

CARRIE. “Is that a problem?” What kind of question is that, “is that a problem?”

MIRANDA. Of course it’s a problem.

CHARLOTTE. What did you say?

CARRIE. I said it wasn’t a problem. I panicked; he’s such a good kisser.

SAMANTHA. You know that generation is all about sexual experimentation. All the kids are going bi.

[...]

CARRIE. I’m not even sure bisexuality exists; I think it’s just a layover on the way to Gaytown.

[...]

SAMNATHA. You know, I think it’s great. He’s open to all sexual experiences, he’s evolved. It’s hot.

MIRANDA. It’s not hot, it’s greedy. He’s double dipping. (“Boy, Girl, Boy, Girl, ...”)

First of all, Carrie is of the opinion that being bisexual is something which should be kept a secret and which should not be openly discussed. And it is an enormous problem for her that her boyfriend identifies as bisexual. Why exactly never becomes clear. However, through this exchange the characters are also shown to be extremely bi-phobic because they completely erase the possibility of bisexuality being a sexual orientation. Samantha sees bisexuality as sexual experimentation, something which everyone of a certain age tries out. Carrie even doubts that it exists and sees it as something which leads to becoming gay, as if everyone who says they are bisexual will inevitably settle into a same-sex relationship. Miranda, finally, calls bisexuals greedy because, to her, bisexuality is a sexual orientation you claim to identify with in order to be able to have sexual intercourse with as many people as possible.

Considering these examples, it is safe to say that bisexuality is something which is in need of proper representation. *Sherlock* could make a first step into the right direction by making John Watson openly bisexual without demonising his sexual orientation. This possibility will further be discussed in the following chapters.

So far, bisexuality, when it is not portrayed in a bad light, is not mentioned as a feasible alternative to being gay or straight. San Filippo writes about movies which involve love triangles where the characters of the same gender enter into a relationship in the end. However those films “typically [involve] a sexually ‘confused’ character who ultimately discovers his or her ‘true’ nature to be monosexual” (39).

Sherlock rules out this possibility from the beginning. As was mentioned above, John goes to great lengths to assure everyone he meets that he is not gay. It is therefore highly unlikely that, should Sherlock and John become a couple, John will suddenly identify as homosexual.

On the one hand, even the creators of *Sherlock* deny that bisexuality exists. Mark Gatiss, co-creator of the show and an openly gay man, said in an interview with *The Guardian* in October 2010, “I had a girlfriend before I ever had a boyfriend, but it was just a phase. I think a lot of people who say they are bisexual aren’t. I loved her dearly and we had a very nice time, but on the Kinsey scale, I would say I was always predominantly gay”. This is reminiscent of the conversation from *Sex and the City* discussed above. Bisexuality is just a phase and will inevitably lead to people defining as gay. This might be an obstacle when arguing that John can be read as bisexual when even the writers deny that this sexual orientation exists.

The BBC in general, on the other hand, is fully aware of bisexuality and has even created bisexual characters, such as Captain Jack Harkness in *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood*. Russell T. Davies, creator of Harkness, said in an interview with *Digital Spy* in June 2008,

I thought: “It’s time you introduce bisexuals properly into mainstream television,” [...] The most boring drama would be – “Oh, I’m bisexual, oh my bleeding heart” nighttime drama. Tedious, dull. But if you say it’s a bisexual space pirate swaggering in with guns and attitude and cheek and humour into primetime family viewing - that was enormously attractive to me.

The BBC can represent bisexual characters in a positive light; they would not shy away if *Sherlock* would introduce a bisexual John Watson.

The following chapters, therefore, will show how John can be read as bisexual. However, it is also necessary to draw attention to the character of Irene Adler, a lesbian, who apparently “turns straight” for Sherlock. Here, *Sherlock* erases the possibility of bisexuality.

Before this analysis can be carried out, the third work which will be used has to be introduced: *Television Culture* by John Fiske. The remaining chapter presents the concept of male and female television, as well as the concept of television codes.

2.2 Television Culture

John Fiske's book *Television Culture*, despite first being published in 1987, still offers thoughts and analyses which are relevant for analysing television today. Especially the chapters on gendered television and the chapter on television codes will be looked at in the following two subchapters.

To begin with, the chapters "Chapter 10: Gendered Television: Femininity" and "Chapter 11: Gendered Television: Masculinity" are discussed. It can be argued that *Sherlock* is a show aimed at a male audience because it is written and produced by (mostly) men and is about the story of two men living together and solving crimes, with women only appearing as secondary characters. However, *Sherlock* also displays traits associated with female television, especially in the third series, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

The second, equally important, part taken from *Television Culture* is "Chapter 1: Some Television, Some Topics, and Some Terminology", especially the subchapter on television codes. Television, according to Fiske (4) can be analysed on various levels, reality, representation, and ideology. This will be done for select scenes from each series of *Sherlock* in Chapters 4-6 to show how the codes present in the narrative and the structure can be interpreted as signalling romance between Sherlock and John.

2.2.1 Male and Female Television

In "Chapter 11", Fiske writes about what constitutes male television. Of course, it is important to point out, as Fiske (198) does, that "[m]asculinity is [...] a cultural construct". There is no such thing as male or female television, but these notions are constructed through culture.

In his analysis of male television, Fiske writes about *The A-Team*, a show which was popular in the 1980s. It is about a team of four men who are Vietnam veterans and help people in need, provided they can pay for their services. The four men are also on the run from the government which seeks to convict them for a crime of which they are not guilty.

According to Fiske (201), the show is an example of male television because, in capitalism, "men must undergo a complex set of experiences involving repressions, guilt, and contradictory feelings", which are all connected to women, work, and marriage. *The A-Team*, however, manages to not take any of these obstacles into account in its narrative structure (202).

First of all, "women are written out of the narrative" (204). The show does not have important female characters, taking away the possibility for the men in the A-Team to

feel this complex set of feelings. The same cannot be said for *Sherlock*, simply because the series is 27 years younger than *The A-Team*, and today it would not be possible to produce shows which do not feature any female characters. Nevertheless, as was already mentioned, women in *Sherlock* are often not presented in a positive light.

Fiske (2006) also observes “images of male power breaking free [as] metaphors for masculinity’s desire to break through the laws and the social constraints with which society tries to contain it”. The title sequence, as an example, contains these images and they are repeated over and over in each episode of *The A-Team*. Fiske argues that men want to break free from work and marriage and that they can act this out through the adventures of the A-Team. Something similar can be observed for *Sherlock*, especially for the first two series, for example in John resigning his job to solve crimes with Sherlock, undeniably an adventurous activity.

Finally, Fiske raises the topic of male bonding by stating that,

[t]he exscription of women leads to a male bonding which is a close relationship protected from the threat of intimacy. The bond of the A-Team, of Magnum and his co-heroes, is goal-oriented, not relationship-oriented. The relationship is there to serve a common goal, not the needs of the relationship itself; it depends on action not on feeling. The need to depend on others is there, but it is externalized onto a goal, not internalized into a basic need of the male. The closeness of the ensuing relationship does not, therefore, threaten masculine independence, and the justification of this intimacy by the external goal means that the relationship can contain homosexual desire and pleasure without either the guilt or the unmaning that typify representations of the homosexual in a heterosexual ideology. (212)

Men form strong bonds because women are absent, but these bonds are not intimate, or even homosexual, but focused on the achievement of a goal. Or rather, they can contain the desire for homosexuality, but are not devalued because of this because they are based in action, not in need for closeness or feeling. It is impossible to go into detail concerning *Sherlock* at this point, but nevertheless it needs to be mentioned that this does not hold true for *Sherlock*. The bond between Sherlock and John is forged through need (not, perhaps, for closeness initially), and them needing each other is developed over the course of the nine episodes.

Despite displaying features of male television, *Sherlock* cannot be considered a product of it because it also fulfils some of the categories of female television. For this analysis, Fiske does not choose a single show as an example, but writes about the genre of soap opera.

Soap operas differ from forms of male television. For example, they “are never in a state of equilibrium, but their world is one of perpetual disturbance and threat” (Fiske

180). Fiske goes on to give examples for this, saying that even a marriage, which would give a traditional romance film a happy and stable ending, is the object of disturbance in a soap opera, since otherwise the show would be boring to watch. Interestingly, something similar can be observed for *Sherlock*, where John's supposedly happy marriage in the second episode of Series 3 is interrupted and plunged into chaos in the following episode.

Another feature of the soap opera, according to Fiske (182) is that "narrative strand[s] [have] no climax to close [them] off [...] the outcome of most plotlines is relatively unimportant, and often not really in doubt". This, again, is a feature of *Sherlock*. Every series ends in a cliffhanger which is then resolved quickly in the next episode to move on with the story as fast as possible, offering no real closure to the audience.

Finally, the topic of reception needs to be mentioned, which is also hugely important when looking at *Sherlock*. Fiske writes about how soap opera is incorporated into the "oral culture of women" (279) in the form of gossip. Women talk about the plot lines and discuss character developments, just as they would talk about the lives of friends and relatives. Something similar happens with the reception of *Sherlock*. It starts with the discussion of theories when the next episodes are still being filmed, and ends with writing elaborate analyses on how the cliffhangers for each series are going to be resolved. Gossip is something associated with female television, as Fiske defines it. "The word gossip is clearly from a phallogocentric discourse: its connotations are of triviality and femininity, and it is opposed, by implication, to serious male talk" (77). According to Fiske, men would never meet and talk with their male friends about television shows they are watching, discussing plot points and character development. Of course, this also has changed since the 1980s with people of different genders gathering on the internet or in real life to discuss their favourite shows. Nevertheless, Fiske reads these activities as attributes of female television, and they will be treated as such in the context of this paper. Also, most of the people talking about *Sherlock* online are still female, as are the people participating in offline discussions. But first, the topic of television codes needs to be addressed.

2.2.2 Television Codes

In "Chapter 1: Some Television, Some Topics, and Some Terminology", Fiske introduces the concept of television codes. He states that, "[a] code is a rule-governed system of signs, whose rules and conventions are shared amongst members of a culture, and which is used to generate and circulate meanings in and for that culture" (4). Fiske (Figure 1.1) distinguishes between four different types of codes: social, technical, conventional representational, and ideological. They function on three

levels, the levels of reality, representation, and ideology. It needs to be mentioned, however, that “‘reality’ is already encoded [...] there is no universal, objective way of perceiving and making sense of it” (4f.). This is the reason why even the level of reality is subjected to codes.

Reality, according to Fiske (Figure 1.1) is governed by social codes, such as appearance, speech, sound, and so on. It is then further encoded by technical codes on the level of representation, such as camera, music, and editing. These technical codes “transmit the conventional representational codes, which shape the representations of” (Fiske Figure 1.1) conflict, dialogue, narrative, etc. The conventional representational codes, finally, are governed by the ideological codes on the level of ideology, such as patriarchy, capitalism, and race (Fiske Figure 1.1).

Two important scenes from each series of *Sherlock* will be analysed in Chapters 4-6 with the help of the television codes. This analysis will help to view the scenes in a homoromantic light by drawing attention to the different codes, such as behaviour and appearance for the social codes, camera and lighting for the technical codes, dialogue and character development for the conventional representational codes, and sexuality and queerness for the ideological codes.

This chapter gave an overview over the three main texts which will be used in order to analyse *Sherlock* in the following chapters. It introduced the concepts of homosocial desire and bisexuality, as well as television theory.

The difference between homosocial desire and homosexuality/bisexuality lies in the definitions used in this chapter. Homosocial desire is characterised through the need to form a strong (emotional) bond with a person of the same sex. This bond can also be characterised by homophobia. However, bonds between men in shows such as *The A-Team* can also be read as homosocial, but there are no emotions involved. Rather, the men bond through a common goal as well as through the absence of women.

The bond between Sherlock and John in *Sherlock* can be read as a homosocial bond. Both men enjoy each other's company and their acquaintance is even formed because of a common goal (to find affordable accommodation), rather than through the need for closeness to another man. Even the absence of women can be observed, even though John frequently dates women.

The homosocial bond between them is only threatened when John marries a woman, and not because Sherlock does not accept this marriage because he sees his homosocial bond with John threatened, but because the safety of a stable

heterosexual relationship gives John the possibility to express his queerness openly, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Bisexuality, then, is the sexual attraction to both men and women. In the first two series of *Sherlock*, John can be read as a repressed bisexual at best. He frequently denies being gay and being in love with Sherlock and takes great care of always dating a woman to assert his heterosexuality. He does not seem to crave anything more than a strong homosocial bond between him and Sherlock. However, John also acts extremely jealous as soon as Irene Adler in Series 2 threatens this homosocial bond, as well as when Sherlock gets engaged to a woman in Series 3. In Series 3, reading John as bisexual becomes more feasible because a man who can be read as his ex-boyfriend is introduced. John also becomes more open to the possibility of entering into a romantic and/or sexual relationship with Sherlock, even though he gets married in the second episode. This also becomes evident when looking at how other people perceive their relationship. Whereas in Series 1 and 2, there are 17 instances of outsiders assuming they are a couple, there are only three such instances in Series 3. In contrast, Sherlock and John themselves are shown more frequently expressing desire for a deep (homosocial/homosexual) bond.

The bond between Sherlock and John is homosocial; this cannot be denied. In the beginning, their bond is goal-orientated as well as formed through the absence of women and characterised by homosexual panic on John's part. However, there is also the possibility of both Sherlock and John wanting to enter into a romantic and/or sexual relationship with the other. In order for this to work, John has to identify as bisexual, since he frequently states he is not gay and therefore it would be impossible for him to be in a relationship with Sherlock and say he is gay. If John were to enter into a relationship with Sherlock, he would still feel emotional desire to be with him, but there would also be another factor, namely a sexual one. How this transition is achieved is the focus of the discussion in Chapter 4-6.

The next chapter will give an introduction to *Sherlock*. It gives an overview over the world in which *Sherlock* is set, as well as an introduction to how a possible queering of the relationship between Sherlock and John is seen by the media and by the writers.

3 Background: *Sherlock*

*Sherlock*³ is a British television show produced by Hartswood Films and BBC Wales. It was co-created by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss and consists of three series, nine episodes, one unaired pilot, and one mini-episode. A Christmas special is currently in

³ See: http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1475582/?ref_=ttco_co_tt, accessed: 17 March 2015.

post-production and will air around Christmas this year with a fourth series scheduled for 2016. *Sherlock* takes the characters of Sherlock Holmes and John Watson as invented by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and puts them into the setting of modern-day London. According to Steward (140), *Sherlock* “combines one-off dramas (cases opened and shut within the episode) and serial narration”. This makes it possible to watch a single episode of the show and be able to understand what is going on (this holds true, at least, for the first two series), but there is also a continuing narrative which evolves with every new episode.

The first series aired in July and August 2010 and consists of three episodes: “A Study in Pink” (written by Steven Moffat), “The Blind Banker” (written by Stephen Thompson) and “The Great Game” (written by Mark Gatiss). Before the airing of these episodes, Moffat and Gatiss pitched a pilot episode, which was written by Moffat. This pilot has the same plotline as “A Study in Pink”, but is 30 minutes shorter and does not introduce the character of Mycroft Holmes. Since it was never officially aired, it will not be considered for the analysis in the next chapter.

The first series was already successful. According to Hoyle & Foster (qtd. in Rixon 175), “A Study in Pink” attracted 7.7 million viewers on its first airing. The first series starts with Sherlock and John meeting and moving in together and ends with them in immediate danger when Moriarty threatens to have them shot and killed. People who watched the first series when it aired had to wait for almost two years to learn how Sherlock and John escape their almost certain death.

The second series aired in January 2012 and consists, again, of three episodes: “A Scandal in Belgravia” (written by Moffat), “The Hounds of Baskerville” (written by Gatiss), and “The Reichenbach Fall” (written by Thompson). The cliffhanger from “The Great Game” is resolved quickly with a phone call, so the story of Sherlock and John working and living together can continue as fast as possible. “The Reichenbach Fall” ends with Sherlock faking his death by jumping off a roof when Moriarty threatens to kill all his friends. This time, fans of the series had to wait for two years to learn how Sherlock survives.

Before the airing of the third series, the BBC aired a mini-episode on 24 December 2013, called “Many Happy Returns” (written by Moffat and Gatiss), which is set after Series 2. In 7 minutes, it shows how Sherlock is slowly making his way back to London, solving cases along the way. Moreover, John is shown watching a video Sherlock recorded for his birthday.

The third series aired in January 2014 and consists of three episodes yet again: “The Empty Hearse” (written by Gatiss), “The Sign of Three” (written by Moffat, Gatiss, and

Thompson) and “His Last Vow” (written by Moffat). This series shows how Sherlock’s return to his former life is not as easy as he had hoped, with John being engaged and marrying in the second episode. “His Last Vow” ends with Sherlock being sent away on a secret mission as punishment for killing the main villain of Series 3, Charles Augustus Magnussen. However, he is called back immediately because Moriarty apparently returns from the dead.

Even though *Sherlock* produces very little episodes as compared to other shows, and even though there are long breaks between the series, it is still popular and in demand. According to BBC News, 9.2 million viewers watched “The Empty Hearse” when it first aired. The long breaks might even be the reason why it is so popular, since it airs only every two years and people are expecting the new episodes eagerly.

After this short introduction to the primary texts, the rest of this chapter will give an overview over *Sherlock* compared to the original stories written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, as well as an overview over production discourse and fan discourse.

3.1 From the 19th Century to the 21st Century

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle published his 56 short stories and four novels between 1887 and 1927. The years the stories were published in are not always the years the stories are set in. The chronological order has led to much debate within the community of Sherlock Holmes fans because not every story gives a date. Various articles have been written and published on this topic.

One such publication is the chronological table “The Life and Times of Sherlock Holmes” published in *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes, Volume III*, written by Leslie Klinger. Klinger (853 ff.) sets the first story, “The Adventure of the *Gloria Scott*”, in 1874 and the last story, “His Last Bow” in 1914. In other words, the stories range from the Victorian era through the Edwardian era to the outbreak of the First World War. Most of them are set over 100 years before the events taking place in *Sherlock*. It is therefore of importance to compare the original stories to the show.

First of all, it needs to be pointed out that “Sherlock Holmes has always been considered the epitome of English culture. We [the readers] picture him riding a hansom cab through London, investigating dark alleys and tracing clues at a crime scene near the Thames” (Lamerichs 179). This also becomes evident when looking at various adaptations, from the films starring Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce to the films directed by Guy Ritchie. The first example has Holmes and Watson fighting against Nazis during the Second World War and the second example has an American actor playing a British icon, which raises the question if Robert Downey Jr. is qualified to

take on such a role. He playing Holmes has the effect that the character is internationalised. He is not simply a British icon anymore, but a character who can be portrayed by an American as easily as by a British actor. Still, despite Robert Downey Jr. being an American actor, Holmes in the films remains an “epitome of British culture”. He rides in cabs, he investigates in the middle of the night in narrow alleys, and he searches for clues in the mud. The same can be observed for *Sherlock*. Even though the show is set in 21st century London, Sherlock uses taxis instead of the Tube, he sneaks through backstreets and across rooftops, and he once even looks for clues at a crime scene near the Thames.

The main focus of the stories is Sherlock Holmes solving crimes. Harrington (72) points out that the “original Holmes stories respond to increasing anxiety over crime, including violence from abroad, offering a reassuring vision of order restored that validates the status quo”. The first ever *Sherlock Holmes* story to be published was the novel *A Study in Scarlet*, which was printed just a few months before the Jack the Ripper murders in 1888. This as well as troubles in Ireland and anarchist bombings are the reason for why Harrington reads the stories as a “response to the terror present in late 19th century London” (72). In other words, the time during which Arthur Conan Doyle started to write about Holmes was unstable and frightening for the British population.

Holmes is almost never involved in political issues. Harrington (73) writes that “[b]y keeping Holmes’s work apart from larger political movements or unrest, Conan Doyle ensures that Holmes’s genius in problem solving remains at the forefront of the narrative, thus providing a pleasurable escape from larger social concerns”. Arthur Conan Doyle’s audience found solace in reading about Holmes solving small crimes which did not have much effect on politics. This is similar to audiences today enjoying shows such as *CSI: Miami* or *The Mentalist*, where every week the detectives have to solve a comparatively small crime which does not affect many people. This is emphasised by the fact that “the Holmes stories were written and published during a time of terrorist incidents that resonate with our current sensibility” (Harrington 81). There is not only still a war in Afghanistan, London also still suffers from terrorist attacks and bombings, for example the 7 July 2005 London bombings. It is therefore not surprising that people still look for an escape in crime shows which do not address larger political problems, but focus on small, personal crimes, such as *Sherlock*.

Harrington draws the conclusion that “having Holmes investigate an anarchist bombing would work against the premise of the stories, which tend to understand and present crime as a personal issue” (82). Holmes never investigates an anarchist

bombing in the original stories. He is sometimes involved in political issues, such as in “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans” or in “His Last Bow”. The same can be observed for *Sherlock*. A case similar to “The Bruce-Partington Plans” appears in “The Great Game”, and in “A Scandal in Belgravia”, Sherlock investigates a fake terrorist attack in the form of a plane crash. Other than that, the show only deals with minor crimes. In Series 3, however, Sherlock has to prevent a terrorist bombing of the Houses of Parliament carried out via the Underground network, which is reminiscent of the 2005 terrorist attacks. Series 3, as will be shown later, is different from the first two series in various points and it is difficult to analyse it according to the same parameters as the first two.

The name of the show itself suggests that the creators were aiming for a modern, accessible update: they focus on the first name of the main character. In “A Study in Pink”, when Sherlock and John meet to look at the flat at 221B Baker Street, John calls Sherlock “Mr Holmes”, to which Sherlock replies, “Sherlock, please” (“A Study in Pink”). From then on, they only call themselves by their first names. According to Stein & Busse, this denotes an “emphasis on character accessibility”, especially for the character of Sherlock because “the whole series is presented as ‘Sherlock,’ announcing the more human presentation of the character” (12).

How the character of Sherlock Holmes is presented has also not changed much from the 19th century to today. This, however, leads to many misunderstandings and problems within the show. In the stories, Holmes is allowed to display emotions, which many detectives today cannot. “He is introduced as a bouncy chemistry geek who celebrates the discovery of a new detection method as if he had won the lottery” (Heyn 116). Sherlock in *Sherlock* is also shown as displaying positive emotions, albeit under the wrong circumstances, for example when he hears about a new murder in “A Study in Pink” or when he says he is having a good time while investigating the disappearance of two children in “The Reichenbach Fall”. His joy at solving crimes is often met with disbelief and incomprehension by the people surrounding him. Sherlock needs John to tell him how to behave at a crime scene and that he should not smile when lives are at stake.

The original stories were written during a time when “[b]iblical scholarship, geology, and Darwinism all caused serious doubt as to the validity of Christian faith and the belief that God was the all-powerful creator” (Scott-Zechlin 57). Holmes is a man of science, not a man of faith. He believes in the superiority of his own intellect and reason. “Holmes was not just a symbol of science’s power but rather its specific power

to *protect*” (Scott-Zechlin 59). He only remembers what he can use in the fight against criminals.

Sherlock in *Sherlock* is similar to Holmes in the stories. He only remembers what is important to protect and has no consideration for other knowledge. In “The Great Game”, he almost fails to save the life of a young boy because he does not see astronomy as valuable knowledge, meaning that today there is so much more knowledge than during the Victorian era that it has become impossible to distinguish between what is useful and what is not. Therefore, Sherlock is willing to learn, “even if it requires a few childish tantrums along the way, and John Watson acts as his teacher” (Scott-Zechlin 61). Sherlock’s treatment of knowledge is the first indicator that a man like Sherlock Holmes who would have been admired in the 19th century now struggles to find his path in our modern world. Bochman (145) points out that, “[i]n the Victorian period, his [Holmes’] stoic detachment was more acceptable by society’s more reserved behavioral standards”.

Sherlock functions as an example of “how the power of human reasoning should be combined with human faith to create a better man” (Scott-Zechlin 64). In the stories, Holmes already is the best man he could possibly be, but in the 21st century it is not enough to have a vast intellect, at least according to John and other characters, such as Donovan and Anderson; a human being also needs to show compassion and understand people to be seen as a valuable member of society. Otherwise, this person is seen as a psychopath, which happens to Sherlock in “A Study in Pink”. In this episode, Anderson, who works for Scotland Yard, calls Sherlock “our favourite psychopath”, to which Sherlock replies, “I’m a high-functioning sociopath” (“A Study in Pink”).

The 19th century and the 21st century share various characteristics, such as fear of terror attacks and a war in Afghanistan. This is one of the reasons why Sherlock Holmes is still a popular figure and why shows like *Sherlock* are so in demand. However, a man like Sherlock Holmes struggles in today’s world, which suggests that our time might not have as many similarities with the Victorian age after all. This becomes obvious when looking at technology.

Bochman writes that “there appears to be a greater discomfort with technology in *Sherlock*, especially with regard to technology bound to intelligence, than in Conan Doyle’s texts” (145). In *Sherlock*, Sherlock is shown using modern technology, such as mobile phones and the internet, to gain information, just as Holmes uses telegrams. Sherlock even has his own website, “The Science of Deduction”, “where he communicates both with clients and criminals” (Bochman 148). However, whereas

technological advances were mostly welcomed in the Victorian age, modern technology today is often seen as a threat. It is therefore not surprising that characters in *Sherlock* struggle with Sherlock's ease when it comes to using technology, for example in "A Study in Pink", where he uses a weather map on his phone to determine the hometown of a murdered woman, something which would not have occurred to Scotland Yard.

So far, similarities as well as differences between the original stories and *Sherlock* were the focus of the discussion. There are still resemblances in the society and the audience's needs, even in the character of Sherlock Holmes himself. However, how the character is perceived by his friends and colleagues has changed drastically since the 19th century. To find an explanation for the similarities and the differences, it is vital to consider the question of whether or not *Sherlock* really is set in 21st century London or if it, in fact, takes place in a neo-Victorian society.

In the article "*Sherlock* and the (Re)Invention of Modernity", Basu addresses exactly this question by saying that, "Moffat and Gatiss tacitly claim that their *Sherlock* retains everything essential about Conan Doyle's universe, that it takes place 'today,' and that this 'today' exists in a time-line in which there has never before been a Sherlock Holmes" (204). However, these three points are, according to her, not true; they cannot be.

First of all, *Sherlock* cannot exist in a world in which there has never been a Sherlock Holmes before, not if the writers claim they bring everything which is quintessentially Sherlockian to the 21st century. Moreover, as Basu claims, "*Sherlock*'s timeline cannot be the same as ours, and this means that [...] *Sherlock*'s modern is not ours either" (204).

Sherlock would also not exist in our world, had there not been a Sherlock Holmes before. "[T]he [detective] genre itself seems to be wound deeply into our conception of science and philosophy, our sense of truth and order in the universe, and our ability to know them" (Basu 203f.). And the *Sherlock Holmes* stories started this interest in detective fiction. Without them, it is highly unlikely that a show like *Sherlock* would find such a broad audience today.

It is also important to look at London, the city in which the stories as well as *Sherlock* are set. Kustritz and Kohnen write that the "BBC's reimagined version offers a picture of an increasingly multi-cultural, heterogeneous London" (87). This might be true on the surface. *Sherlock* introduces Chinatown in "The Blind Banker", as well as characters with an ethnic background, for example Sally Donovan, who works for Scotland Yard, or Mr Chatterjee, Mrs Hudson's boyfriend from Pakistan. However,

those characters do not have much agency and are often in the background, while the main cast is white, not giving an accurate representation of London's population today.

Kustritz and Kohnen further point out that "at the same time, it re-presents some startlingly similar stereotypes based on race, class, nationality, and criminal typology, all of which would not have been out of place at the turn of the 20th century" (87). Chinese people are presented as having a questionable background as well as a criminal career in "The Blind Banker", and Sherlock still uses a group of homeless people to gain information while looking down on them. Moreover, people from other countries are mere stereotypes, for example the CIA agents in "A Scandal in Belgravia" or the Chinese criminals in "The Blind Banker", and criminals in general often have corporal features which set them apart from the rest, for example the Golem in "The Great Game".

Even villains who are prominently featured, like Jim Moriarty and Charles Augustus Magnussen or even Dr Frankland in "The Hounds of Baskerville" are foreigners or have spent considerable time abroad. One of the reasons why Sherlock identifies Dr Frankland as the murderer is because he says "cell phone" rather than "mobile phone" because he spent time in Indiana. Moriarty, played by Irish actor Andrew Scott, retains his Irish accent for parts of his performance and makes his grand appearance by strapping people to bombs, reminiscent of the troubles with Ireland at the end of the 19th century. Magnussen, then, is based on Charles Augustus Milverton from the story "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton", in which he is of British nationality. Magnussen, on the other hand, does not only have a foreign name, he is also played by Lars Mikkelsen, a Danish actor, who uses a heavy accent for his performance. It is therefore safe to argue that the main villains are foreigners. This might not have been surprising at the end of the 19th century where there were tensions between European nations which then led to the outbreak of the First World War. Today, however, it is strange to paint every villain as a foreigner, especially when the show is set in multi-cultural London.

The characters present in *Sherlock* are not the only point which makes it questionable that the show is set in the 21st century. Basu points to the topic of architecture. She explains that "*Sherlock's* 'now' is not located in time, but in aesthetics" (204). In *Sherlock*, only architecture from the 19th century and the 21st century is shown. Most of the 20th century does not exist architecturally, even though it left a visible mark on London's city landscape as it is known today. For Basu, this means that "*Sherlock's* 21st century seems almost like a reconstruction of the 19th century's version of the

future, not the present in which we actually live” (199). Without showing 20th-century architecture, it is difficult to argue that *Sherlock* does, in fact, take place today.

The architecture used in *Sherlock* is not the only indicator for it not being set in 21st century London. As was already mentioned above, *Sherlock* often presents racial or classist prejudices without questioning them or pointing to their faultiness. Moreover, it presents the character of Sherlock himself as someone who does not belong in our time, no modern man at all. “Holmes was designed by Conan Doyle to be of the scientific vanguard, looking forward to the future” (Basu 201). Moffat and Gatiss certainly try to present their Sherlock as such a man by claiming he uses his mobile phone to gather information. His other actions, however, are questionable.

Basu (202) gives the example of how the audience is introduced to Sherlock. In “A Study in Pink”, he is seen attacking a corpse with a riding crop to see which bruises form after death. This experiment is carried out by Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet* (19) where it is represented as revolutionary. In *Sherlock*, however, the experiment is not necessary since it is well-established by modern forensics which bruises would form if the corpse is beaten after death. Therefore, “the experiment, which denotes Holmes’s scientific progression in the novel, here demonstrates Sherlock’s gaze backwards” (202).

By orientating themselves by the Victorian era, Moffat and Gatiss have created a Sherlock who is racist, classist, scientifically backward, and who lives in a mirror world to 19th century London. As was mentioned above, current events are similar to events happening when *A Study in Scarlet* was first published: there is still a war in Afghanistan and people in London are still subject to terrorist attacks. Therefore, it is easy to draw comparisons to Arthur Conan Doyle’s world, and it appears easy to update his stories to our time. However, it is not enough to take Holmes’ cases and set them in 2010, as the example of the use of the riding crop shows. Moreover, the mentality also needs to be updated. One stroll through London shows that not everyone living there is white and middle-class. In fact, the opposite is true. Nevertheless, *Sherlock* is stuck in a world in which London is mostly white, and people who are of a different ethnicity or from another country are either criminals or have to be treated with caution because they follow stereotypes associated with their nation of origin.

Considering all the points raised in this chapter so far, it can be argued that *Sherlock* is set in a neo-Victorian world and not in the 21st century. This is not necessarily a bad thing, as long as the show is not constantly referred to as bringing Holmes to the 21st

century, which it is. To have achieved this, more work would have been necessary on the part of Moffat and Gatiss.

The next part of the chapter gives an overview over production and fan discourse. Both Moffat and Gatiss are fans of the original stories, which legitimises them to create a faithful adaptation. In the past, both have expressed negative sentiments when confronted with the possibility of queering the relationship between Sherlock and John. Fans who create fanart or fanfiction depicting such a relationship were mocked by the media in an attempt to express dominance over a (mostly) female fanbase. A discussion of fandom demographic can be found in Chapter 6. However, as this next part shows, Moffat has become much more welcoming toward fans and their passions, resulting in him admitting that he needs to change the way he writes minorities and treats his fans.

3.2 Fan Discourse and Production Discourse

Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss are both fans of the original stories. They have a vast knowledge, which also includes adaptations such as the films with Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce or the Billy Wilder film *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*. According to Harrington “[t]heir status as fans legitimizes their connection with these characters” (79). In other words, as fans, Moffat and Gatiss can be trusted to produce a show faithful to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s books.

However, the show which they have produced seems a conservative reimagining of the original stories in 21st century London. *Sherlock* is far from being an open-minded, liberal show, which would allow Sherlock and John to enter into a romantic and/or sexual relationship, at least according to Basu (203) when she writes that, “it is possible to read *Sherlock* as having an essentially conservative ideology”. Would a conservative show ever be open to an ending where the two male leads enter into a relationship and become partners, especially a show which is written by two men who frequently dismiss a queer possibility?

The writers are aware of the queer subtext of their show and often dismiss the possibility of queering Sherlock and John. As Hills (40) points out, “[t]he great game of fandom played via the production discourses of Gatiss and Moffat remains, finally, in the service of professional, authorial distinctions, while textually-disciplined codings of affectively flat fandom imply that fan passions should be kept under masculinized control”. Fans and their readings are acknowledged, but ultimately the people who get to decide what happens next are men who control a passionate fan community.

Sherlock has a large (online) fan community. As Stein & Busse write, “*Sherlock* fandom has manifested visibly in a wide range of online spaces, from livejournal.com to denofgeek.com, from twitter.com to tumblr.com, from archiveofourown.org to fanfiction.net” (13). The official Facebook page has 4.7 million likes⁴ and on fanfiction.net, *Sherlock* is on fourth place on the list of television shows with 52,000 fanfictions⁵. Fans of *Sherlock* undeniably have a large online presence and some of them are even involved with the show directly, for example The Baker Street Babes, a group of women who produce a podcast about Sherlock Holmes. They were invited to preview screenings of the third series⁶ and to the official *Sherlock* convention in April 2015 to host panels⁷.

Through the internet, it has become much easier for fans to communicate with each other and share their passion. They are even involved in official events. However, the decision to make John and Sherlock a couple will not be made by the online fan community, no matter how many wish for a queering of their relationship, but it will be made by two other fans, Moffat and Gatiss, who still control what will happen with the storyline, despite a large and involved fanbase.

In the past, they quickly dismissed a queer possibility when it was mentioned in interviews. This was mostly done in a respectful way. In an interview with *The Guardian* from January 2012, Moffat said, “[t]here's no indication in the original stories that he [Sherlock] was asexual or gay. He actually says he declines the attention of women because he doesn't want the distraction. What does that tell you about him? Straightforward deduction. He wouldn't be living with a man if he thought men were interesting.” This statement does not make fun of queer people or fans who would like to see John and Sherlock in a relationship. Instead, Moffat expresses his opinion on the topic in a logical way, using the original stories to prove his point, something which is done extensively when it comes to this topic, as was mentioned in the Introduction.

However, the media in general is not as understanding as Moffat is. They make fun of people who create fanart and fanfiction, putting the spotlight on works on which fans spent days or even weeks to show how delusional they are in thinking John and Sherlock would make a good couple. Ultimately, as the two examples below show, this is a demonstration of dominance of powerful media personalities and/or

⁴ See: <https://www.facebook.com/Sherlock.BBCW?fref=ts>, accessed: 30 April 2015.

⁵ See: <https://www.fanfiction.net/tv/>, accessed: 30 April 2015.

⁶ See: <http://bakerstreetbabes.tumblr.com/post/70133318202/apparently-im-having-issues-typing-this-evening>, accessed: 30 April 2015.

⁷ See: <http://bakerstreetbabes.tumblr.com/post/117337217480/bsb-sora-on-stage-with-coslocked-and-sherlock>, accessed: 30 April 2015.

institutions over a fanbase who use various different platforms on the internet to share their love for the show with others.

The first instance occurred in March 2013 when Martin Freeman, who plays John Watson, appeared as a guest on *Graham Norton's Big Chat for Comic Relief*, a talk show. During the conversation, Norton brought up the topic of fanart and proceeded to show drawings of John and Sherlock. The first picture he showed was of Sherlock and John looking at each other. Some members of the audience could be heard laughing in the background. The second one was a drawing of Sherlock and John kissing. While Norton showed it, some members of the audience continued to laugh. The third one showed Sherlock and John having oral intercourse, which Norton called "wrong" while the audience cheered, clapped, and booed. He also showed a drawing of John and Sherlock kissing naked on which John's penis was censored. Finally, before showing a fifth drawing, he mocked the artist by imagining what must have gone through their mind before drawing it. "Can you imagine kind of thinking, 'I do like that programme *Sherlock*. How can I show my appreciation? I'll paint this picture'". He then quickly revealed a drawing of Sherlock and John having penetrative intercourse to his guests (three men) who gaped at it with open mouths while Norton laughed loudly. The audience in the studio did not see the drawing and the audience at home only caught a short glimpse.

In this case, Norton treats fanart as something which is completely new. He acts as if the (mostly female) fans of *Sherlock* are odd and almost creepy because they draw the main characters of their favourite show kissing or having sex. However, imagining characters of a television show to be in a relationship and creating (sometimes explicit) art is nothing new. Fiske (80) writes about *Star Trek* saying, "[s]ome of these imaginings [about the lives of the characters] have grown to novel length and there are even soft-porn novels of Spock and his sex life in circulation. Those privately produced and circulated publications are explicit". Fanart and fanfiction is nothing new. What is new is its easy accessibility. Whereas in the 1960s people had to subscribe to magazines which published fanfiction, today, it is possible to simply google the phrase "Johnlock fanfiction" to find millions and millions of words about Sherlock and John being in a sexual relationship. The media has not yet caught up with this development. Making fun of those drawings, as Norton does, is ultimately making fun of a young female audience for expressing its passion, something which not only the media in general, but also the *Sherlock* creators in particular have often done in the past.

Before the internet, production discourse and fan discourse were strictly divided. 20 years ago, the actors and writers would not have been confronted with what fans of their show create if they had not gone looking for it. Today, talk show hosts often show fanart to actors and actresses to create an environment in which fans can be mocked. This is used to demonstrate power over the fan community, signalling that the writers are still in charge and that what the fans imagine is there to be mocked. Fanart and fanfiction (especially when it is explicit) is not meant for the creators or the actors; it is meant for other fans to offer them a reading which is different from what is presented by the source material, but which is also plausible in the context of the show.

The second instance in which fan creations were mocked happened in December 2013 at a preview screening of "The Empty Hearse". According to an account published by *The Daily Dot*, there was a Q&A after the screening, hosted by Caitlin Moran, a columnist who works for *The Times*. Moran made Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman read a fanfiction story called *Tea*, an explicit story during which John and Sherlock's relationship turns from a homosocial one to a romantic and sexual one. Just like the incident on the *Graham Norton Show*, making Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman read this story is a demonstration of power. One day prior to the event, Moran made fun of fans on her Twitter page, tweeting about people already waiting outside the venue for the screening. When one of her followers responded to the tweet with "#virgins", she replied "SO HARSH SO TRUE". Moran is in a privileged spot. She is the one hosting the Q&A, she is in a power position to have Cumberbatch and Freeman read fanfiction, something which she imagines to be the dream of fans writing and reading such stories. Again, the lines between production discourse and fan discourse are blurred. Caitlin Moran is somewhere in between. She is neither producing the show, nor is she a fan who can be compared to the fans waiting outside the venue. She is a woman in a power position who does not hesitate to demonstrate her dominance over fans.

Fanart and fanfiction are not created to be consumed by the producers and actors, but solely by the fans, something which people in powerful positions in the media do not understand. They are of the opinion that one version created by one group of fans is better in quality than another version created by another group of fans. Moffat and Gatiss' version of the *Sherlock Holmes* stories is critically acclaimed and celebrated worldwide, but a version in which Sherlock and John are a couple is mocked because of the fact that it shows two men in a romantic and/or sexual relationship. In the past, Moffat and Gatiss have not only mocked fans for wanting to see an explicitly queer relationship between Sherlock and John, people like Graham Norton and Caitlin Moran

mocked fans by revealing to a broad audience how fans create something which the show denies them.

This negative treatment of fans has changed since the airing of Series 3 in January 2014. Both actors and writers became much more accepting when confronted with fan phantasies and fans looking for an open, unbiased dialogue where they are taken seriously. At *Sherlocked*, the first ever official *Sherlock* convention, which took place from 24 to 26 April 2015 at the ExCel in London, Steven Moffat and producer Sue Vertue attended a panel where they talked about *Sherlock* and then answered questions from the audience⁸. This panel took place on Sunday, 26 April 2015 on the second stage from 4:15 to 5pm and can be found in the programme under “Hartwood Films”. Steven Moffat is not only co-creator and one of the writers on *Sherlock*, he is also Board Director at Hartwood Films, the company which produces *Sherlock*, which means he is also involved in monetary decisions concerning the show. He is therefore at liberty to decide how he wants the story to progress without having to consult a Board of Directors first.

Steven Moffat received a question from a fan who asked him about representation of minorities (both people with different ethnicities as well as people with different sexual orientations) in his writing. Moffat replied that he had always thought representation just happens and that a writer does not have to do much work. Then he went on to admit that it was not as easy as this and that he was not happy with how he had written minorities in the past. He also promised he would improve his writing to portray minorities in a better light.

He also received a question concerning fanfiction, which he answered with a three minute long speech about this topic, which he started by saying that he calls fanfiction simply fiction because this is what it is. In his opinion, a piece of writing which has been published by a publishing house is not of higher value than a piece of writing which was published online and written for a fan community. He also pointed out that it is not similar to the work he does, but that it is the work he does because people write fanfiction to entertain their audience, just as he writes episodes for a television series to entertain his.

This is a change from his earlier viewpoint where he dismissed fan passions. Not once during the 45 minute long panel did he treat fans as they were treated by Graham Norton and Caitlin Moran in the examples above. He also promised to represent

⁸ Since it was not permitted to record the panel and since no official recording was released by Massive Events, the author, who attended this panel, uses paraphrasing instead of direct quotes to give an account of what was said during this panel.

minorities better and encouraged fans to participate in online fandom by creating fanfiction and fanart. This either means that Moffat was misquoted by newspapers in the past (as he also pointed out during the panel) or that he has realised that he has to treat the fans, without whom the show would not be the phenomenon it is, with respect and that he should listen to their criticism. Ultimately, it means that Moffat seems to be more open to suggestions proposing a queering of the relationship between Sherlock and John than he was two years ago.

To sum up, two factors speak against a possible queering of *Sherlock*: *Sherlock*'s conservative ideology and what both Moffat and Gatiss have said in the past about this topic. *Sherlock* takes a conservative stance toward anyone who is not a white male, reducing women, people of colour, and queer people to mere stereotypes. However, as a discussion of the show in Chapters 4-6 shows, *Sherlock* is also set in a world free of homophobia, which opens the door to a possible queering of Sherlock and John's relationship.

As was argued above, Sherlock only solves minor crimes, his character is not presented to be different from Holmes in the original stories, and the London depicted in the show is not the 21st-century London known today, but rather a mirror of 19th-century London. All these points speak against a possible queering and underline the conservative ideology.

These observations hold true for the first two series. However, in Series 3, Sherlock does not solve minor crimes anymore. In "The Empty Hearse", he prevents a terrorist attack, and in "His Last Vow", he is sent away on a secret mission to Eastern Europe. *Sherlock* differs from the original stories in the kind of cases Sherlock has to solve. This, of course, is not proof for a queer possibility. Instead, it can be read as the writers wanting to set *Sherlock* apart from other detective shows by turning Sherlock into a character similar to James Bond.

In the first two series, Sherlock and Holmes do not differ much in character, but rather in how they are seen by other characters around them. Holmes is seen as eccentric, but also as incredibly intelligent and admirable, whereas Sherlock, who shows the same character traits, is seen as a psychopath. In Series 3, Sherlock, as well as John, differ greatly from Holmes and Watson. After Watson's marriage in the original stories, Holmes sometimes asks Watson to join him on a case, but other than that, Watson is content with living the life of a married man. In *Sherlock*, Sherlock takes drugs after John's wedding and John suffers from outbursts of violence. In the original stories, Holmes also takes drugs, but only when there are no cases of interest to him. Yet Sherlock takes drugs in spite of a case because he cannot bare to be apart from John.

Finally, the London shown in *Sherlock* is not an accurate depiction of real-life London. This holds true, even in the third series. Despite the lack of different ethnicities and Sherlock's insistence to travel in a taxi rather than with the Tube, London also has good qualities. There is no homophobia in *Sherlock*'s London, which opens the door to a queer possibility more than the lack of small crimes and the change in character of Sherlock and John.

Even the argument that Moffat and Gatiss would never write Sherlock and John as a queer couple does not hold true anymore. Despite what was said in the past and despite the media treating fans with disrespect and only showing their work to mock them, Moffat recently expressed more openness toward representing minorities and fan passions. *Sherlock* fans are still separated from the production discourse, but they are not mocked or called illusionistic by the writers. It is therefore possible to argue that Moffat would not object to a queering (anymore), even though he is a fan of the original stories and aims for an adaptations which does the books justice.

As was mentioned in the Introduction and in this chapter, both fans and Moffat use the stories to prove that Sherlock is not interested in romantic and/or sexual relationships and that John is not interested in a relationship with Sherlock since he is married to a woman. It is true that in the stories Holmes and Watson are not a couple. Irene Adler is also not a lesbian dominatrix, Mary Morstan is not a CIA trained assassin, Mrs Hudson did not use to be married to a drug dealer, Moriarty is not a consulting criminal but a professor of mathematics, neither Dr Mortimer nor Dr Stapleton are women, there is no Molly Hooper, no Sally Donovan, no string of girlfriends for Watson. The argument that John and Sherlock cannot become a couple because they are not one in the stories simply cannot be used considering how many changes there were already made to the stories.

The following three chapters show that a queer reading is made feasible through the narrative. Every series is analysed using the same criteria to show a gradual development toward creating a world in which Sherlock and John becoming a couple is almost the only ending possible for the series. Other readings are also presented and compared to a queer reading to support the argument.

4 Series 1

This chapter deals with the first series of *Sherlock*. It explores four different topics. Firstly, the relationship between Sherlock and John as it is developed in this series is analysed as well as other relevant relationships. Secondly, the topic of homosexual panic, as presented by the character John Watson is addressed. This is followed by a

discussion of the topics of family and women and how the latter are frequently treated negatively by the narrative. Finally, the relationship between the hero and the villain is discussed, in other words, Sherlock's relationship to Moriarty.

In discussing the relationship between Sherlock and John, a scene from the first episode, "A Study in Pink", is analysed; this scene can be read as raising the topic of a queer possibility only to deny it or it can be read as John expressing romantic and/or sexual interest in Sherlock, but Sherlock rejecting his advances. To discuss the topic of homosexual panic, a scene from "The Blind Banker" is analysed. In this scene, Sherlock seems to be asking John out on a date but John rejects him. The analysis shows how it is possible to read Sherlock as queer in this scene as well as for the rest of the episode.

The discussion of family and women is done by giving explicit examples from the show. Emphasis is devoted to the absence of the bourgeois family consisting of father, mother, and child, while simultaneously showing how characters create an unconventional family for themselves. Women, however, are treated negatively by the narrative. Finally, the similarities between Moriarty and Sherlock are discussed to show how Moriarty opens up the character of Sherlock to a queer possibility by making Sherlock realise he cares for John.

4.1 Relationships

In the original stories, relationships are not the main focus of the narrative. Instead, every story is about Holmes and Watson solving a crime. Relationships only appear at the margin of those tales. However, Watson marries at least once (other marriages are not confirmed, even though there is an ongoing debate about this topic). Watson's wife, Mary Morstan, dies after Holmes fakes his death in "The Final Problem" and when Holmes returns to London, Watson continues living with him in their shared flat at 221B Baker Street.

In *Sherlock*, however, John enters into various relationships with women before marrying Mary Morstan in "The Sign of Three". None of these relationships (even his marriage) function, since he is always drawn back to Sherlock. This part of the chapter, therefore, analyses Sherlock and John's relationship in Series 1.

Over the course of three episodes, Sherlock and John meet, move in together, and negotiate their exact relationship to one another. In "The Blind Banker", for example, Sherlock introduces John as "my friend, John Watson", before John corrects him by calling himself Sherlock's colleague. At the end of "The Great Game", however, John

is willing to sacrifice his life to save Sherlock's by holding Moriarty back and telling Sherlock to run.

Yet, there is also another facet to their relationship: a homosexual one. According to Lavigne (16), "the potential gay reading of the Holmes/Watson relationship is the joke that will not die". In almost every episode, at least one character makes a remark about Sherlock and John being a couple. In Series 1 alone, this topic is addressed nine times, either by a third party or by Sherlock and John themselves. It is raised to dismiss a queer possibility or such a possibility is pointed to but never made explicit, for example in a scene from "A Study in Pink".

To illustrate this topic further, it is necessary to analyse this scene in detail, using Fiske's television codes as introduced in Chapter 2. The first episode, "A Study in Pink", discusses the possibility of Sherlock and John being a couple; "[t]hey have a conversation about the matter, but only in order to dismiss the possibility" (Basu 2006). In this scene, Sherlock and John wait for a murderer at a restaurant. The owner immediately assumes they are on a date, which John denies only to ask Sherlock if he is single shortly afterwards. The discussion will focus on four aspects, one for each of the codes: behaviour, camera, dialogue, and sexuality.

The first code to be discussed in detail is the representational code of behaviour. When they enter the restaurant and the owner, Angelo, comes to the table and suggests that they are on a date, John immediately behaves defensively toward the idea, stating twice that he is not Sherlock's date. He even mutters an annoyed "[t]hanks," ("A Study in Pink") when Angelo brings a candle to the table to make it more romantic. Later, however, John is relaxed and friendly when he asks Sherlock about his personal life. He eats and often looks at Sherlock directly, a calm and open expression on his face. He even seems to be relieved when he finds out that Sherlock is not in a relationship at the moment since he starts to smile when Sherlock tells him so. Sherlock, on the other hand, does not seem to be interested in the conversation much, as he stares out of the window most of the time, watching the street for the murderer. He also does not eat, and only turns his full attention to John when he thinks John is asking him out.

Analysing the behaviour, it is possible to argue that John is interested in Sherlock romantically and/or sexually. He does react annoyed when Angelo suggests this might be a date between Sherlock and him, but then acts relaxed toward Sherlock and asks him about his relationship status. John is relieved when he learns Sherlock is single, another indicator that he might be interested in dating his new flatmate. Denying in front of Angelo that he is Sherlock's date does not contradict a queer reading. Rather, it suggests that John does not want people to know about his sexual orientation

because he fears their reactions; he can be read as bisexual (as discussed below), but he decides to hide this side of his orientation from everyone but Sherlock since he is interested in dating his new flatmate. Nevertheless, he is not scared of flirting with the man he is interested in romantically and/or sexually. Sherlock, however, does not seem interested in John to the same extent, as he keeps watching the street outside.

The second interesting code is the technical code of camera. When John and Sherlock enter the restaurant, the setting is established through a medium long shot. But as soon as John, Sherlock, and Angelo start talking to one another, the shot size changes to medium close-up. Fiske (6) points out that the “normal camera distance in television is mid-shot to close-up, which brings the viewer into an intimate, comfortable relationship with the characters on the screen”. This can be observed here, where the shot size is medium close-up for most of the scene, making it possible for the viewer to get to know Sherlock and John intimately while they are getting to know each other. Sherlock is framed slightly closer than John is. The viewers see John’s head and half his upper body, but they only see Sherlock’s head, neck and part of his shoulders. It is possible to argue that either the audience’s sympathies should be with Sherlock in this scene or that his facial expressions should be paid closer attention to than John’s.

Interestingly, the scene is also sometimes framed by a window, using medium shot, when the camera is outside the restaurant, looking in through a great glass window. In these cases, the viewers see only John’s back, but almost Sherlock’s entire body, even though he is sitting down. This, again, can be read in different ways: either the framed medium shot can be read as an establishing shot, so the audience knows who is where in relation to the street Sherlock and John are watching, or it can be read as the camera establishing intimacy between them.

Analysing the shot sizes, it becomes obvious that the emphasis is on Sherlock’s and John’s emotions. The use of medium close-up for most of the scene makes it easy for the audience to observe their faces and see John’s emotions when he tries to find out if Sherlock is single, and Sherlock’s emotions when he rejects John. Framing them through a glass window suggests intimacy. Another example for when this shot is used can be found in the opening sequence of the show *Gilmore Girls*. It ends with a shot of the two main characters, Lorelai and Rory, who are sitting in a diner. They are filmed through a glass window, deep in conversation. The bond which Lorelai and Rory have is a strong, intimate one. Sherlock and John in “A Study in Pink” have just met, but are already filmed in this way. In “The Blind Banker”, there is another scene of them in a restaurant which is filmed in the same way, through a glass window. In other words, they are being observed from the outside, suggesting intimacy because the audience

is separated from them by a solid barrier. This is an intimate conversation between Sherlock and John in which they talk about emotions, which is underlined by how the camera is used.

The next code of importance is the conventional representational code of dialogue. In this scene, Sherlock first introduces John to Angelo and then does not deny that John is his date (he leaves this to John). John, meanwhile, shows interest in Sherlock's personal life. He has just met Sherlock's archenemy (Sherlock calls him so) and is interested in learning why Sherlock has one because John thinks it is unusual for someone to have an archenemy in real life. Sherlock wants to know what people have in real life, which leads John to discuss the subject of relationships. However, Sherlock deflects this by saying "as I was saying, dull". This leads John to ask Sherlock if he has a girlfriend, which Sherlock labels, "not really my area," which makes John ask if Sherlock has a boyfriend, "[w]hich is fine, by the way". Sherlock points out that he knows it is fine, but also answers he does not have a boyfriend. John says it is "[f]ine" and "[g]ood" that Sherlock is single, which leads Sherlock to believe John is interested in him romantically and/or sexually: "John, um ... I think you should know I consider myself married to my work and while I'm flattered, I'm really not looking for any ..." John immediately denies any interest and adds, "I'm just saying, it's all fine" ("A Study in Pink").

Basu (2006) argues that the scene raises the possibility of queerness only to dismiss it. Sherlock and John discuss their relationship status and sexual preferences only a day after their first meeting. The outcome of this conversation is that John is not interested in Sherlock in a romantic and/or sexual way, and Sherlock does not want to have a relationship at all. This is the reason why Basu argues that the possibility of queerness is dismissed.

However, the scene can also be read as establishing a queer possibility which is not dismissed entirely. Even though John denies being Sherlock's date initially because, as mentioned above, he does not want people to know about his sexual orientation, it is also possible that he is, in fact, interested in entering into a romantic and/or sexual relationship with his new flatmate, since he makes it clear that he does not consider it a problem that Sherlock could have a boyfriend and he also looks relieved when Sherlock tells him he is single. It is also of importance that Sherlock feels the need to inform John he is not looking for a relationship. Sherlock, as was established earlier in the episode, is outstandingly observant, so it is plausible that John is flirting with him, as Sherlock deduces. This is supported by the fact that Sherlock knows when people are interested in him romantically and/or sexually, for example Molly Hooper, who is

discussed below in more detail. Moreover, Sherlock says he is flattered by John's interest, which could mean that, under different circumstances, he might not have said no to the advances.

Finally, the ideological code of sexuality needs to be discussed. In our society, the dominant sexual orientation is heterosexuality. It has to be made explicit by the narrative when a character has a different orientation, since the audience automatically assumes every character they encounter is heterosexual.

On the one hand, the scene can be read as challenging this ideology by including different sexual orientations into the discussion. Moreover, it can be argued that the scene portrays this ideology as outdated, since Angelo automatically assumes Sherlock and John are on a date, even though they are two men. Angelo does not even need a kiss or a hug to make this assumption. This could also mean that Sherlock has had dates with other men in the past in Angelo's restaurant, and therefore Angelo knows about Sherlock's sexual preference and thinks this is another date. On the other hand, the scene also goes to great lengths to make it clear that John is not interested in dating Sherlock. At least he says he is not, even though he seems to show interest in him, as is supported by his behaviour, the shot sizes, and some parts of the dialogue. The only two factors which speak against John being interested romantically and/or sexually in Sherlock is him denying being Sherlock's date (he is not, they are on a stake-out) and saying he is not interested in Sherlock, but only after Sherlock rejects his advances. Both is said because John is not comfortable with expressing his sexual orientation openly. The scene also establishes that Sherlock wants to focus on his work and sees romance, love, and/or sex as a distraction, which means, at this point, he does not welcome John's advances.

This could have been the end of the matter. The writers could have raised the question once (for the fun of it or maybe even because in our society people genuinely would assume Sherlock and John are dating if they are living together), but then they could never have mentioned it again. However, the matter seems to be too good an opportunity for jokes to drop it. In July 2010, Steven Moffat was quoted by *Digital Spy* saying, "[i]t's just that thing of two blokes hanging around together living together - in this nice modern world it leads to people saying, 'Oh, are they a couple?' And that's nice. I thought how the world has changed, there is no disapproval. How much more civilised the world has become."

At first glance, Steven Moffat's statement does not sound problematic. People would assume that if two grown men who are both employed decide to share a flat are a couple and our world has become nicer if people do not see a problem with that.

However, as Basu (206f.) asks, “has it really become more civilized? [...] the writers know that when two men live together these days, questions about sexual orientation will be raised and they must explicitly deny the possibility”. One could argue that our society has not come as far as Moffat wants to make the audience believe, when the possibility of queerness has to be dismissed immediately, as seems to be the purpose of the scene discussed above. The writers could have chosen not to address the subject at all, leaving it to the imagination of the audience in how far the relationship between Sherlock and John can be read as homosexual. Instead, they wrote a scene establishing that John is not interested in dating Sherlock and that Sherlock wants to focus on his work to explicitly close the door on a queer possibility. Yet, the narrative turns to this topic again and again in all nine episodes. This can be called queerbaiting. By pointing to a queer possibility so frequently, but never making it explicit, a queer audience is gained, but not represented.

Interestingly, there are two queer relationships in Series 1. Firstly, John’s sister Harry (who has not appeared on screen so far) is a queer woman who is separating from her wife Clara in “A Study in Pink”. She is also an alcoholic, which John does not approve of. The second queer relationship is between Kenny Prince, brother of Connie Prince, who is murdered in “The Great Game”, and Connie’s houseboy Raoul. Kenny Prince also expresses interest in John when John visits him at home to investigate the murder. He sits close to John and puts his arm on the backrest of the sofa, placing his hand close to John’s shoulder. Later, it is revealed that Raoul murdered Connie because she threatened to disinherit Kenny. Neither one of the queer relationships seems to work; one ends in divorce, the other ends with one of the partners going to prison for committing a murder. Nevertheless, the presence of two queer relationships shows that the writers are aware that such partnerships exist.

At this point, it is also important to mention that there is almost no working heterosexual relationship either. One of the policemen, Anderson, is married, but cheats on his wife with his colleague Sally Donovan. The same episode introduces Jennifer Wilson, whose murder Sherlock investigates. She, too, was cheating on her husband. Sherlock and John’s landlady, Mrs Hudson, was married, but her husband was convicted and executed and Mrs Hudson is thankful to Sherlock because he helped with the conviction. These examples are only from “A Study in Pink”, the other episodes contain many more. The only functional relationship can be found in “The Great Game” between Andrew West, another murder victim, and his fiancée. She is devastated by his death and there is no indication that there were any tensions or problems between the two. It is important to point out that neither heterosexual nor homosexual relationships last long in the first series because it means that neither

relationship is portrayed in a more positive light than the other. It also means that both kinds of relationship are of equal importance, which supports the possibility of Sherlock and John becoming a couple.

To summarise, *Sherlock* draws attention to a queer possibility frequently by addressing the relationship between Sherlock and John. However, this possibility is immediately denied, as illustrated by the scene discussed above. And it is not just this instance. As was already mentioned and as will be discussed in the following chapters, John denies being Sherlock's boyfriend in almost every episode, often in the context of a joke or a gag. This, as Lavigne (17) observes, makes it impossible for a queer reading to be feasible. The question is what the writers try to achieve by coming back to this. The constant alluding to a queer possibility without making it explicit is mean and disrespectful toward people who are looking for examples of representation for queer characters.

So far, the representation discussed above is either stereotypical (for example Kenny Prince who fulfils the stereotype of the gay man who shows interest in another man simply because of his gender, even though Kenny has a boyfriend) or it can be read as queerbaiting. The writers raise the possibility, they point out that a romantic and/or sexual relationship between Sherlock and John is an option, but they do not make it explicit. Especially John is in the way of such a relationship because of, what can be called, homosexual panic. Therefore, this topic needs to be discussed in detail.

4.2 Homosexual Panic

Homosexual panic, as introduced in Chapter 2, is the fear of being blackmailed by society if one has a strong platonic relationship with a person of the same gender. A man might feel threatened by someone assuming he is gay and in a relationship with his close male friend, even though he merely strives for a homosocial relationship. Therefore, such bonds can be characterised by extreme homophobia (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1).

John frequently and fiercely denying he is Sherlock's date or boyfriend can be read as homosexual panic. He wants to stress the fact that he and Sherlock are connected only through a homosocial bond. John himself does not necessarily have to be read as homophobic to justify his homosexual panic. He merely is afraid of what people might think of him. It is obvious that John strives to create a homosocial bond with Sherlock, considering none of his heterosexual relationships are of long continuance, but it is questionable if he wants this bond to become a homosexual one, since he feels the need to deny the possibility frequently.

In Series 1, John defends himself against a queer possibility on three separate occasions. One such instance occurs in “The Blind Banker” and has to be discussed in detail, again using Fiske’s television codes. Sherlock is trying to solve a difficult case involving a ring of Chinese smugglers by cracking a book code. When John comes home from work, Sherlock tells him he wants to go out this evening, but John declines because he has just asked out one of his colleagues, Sarah, and is going on a date with her. Sherlock, however, fails to see the difference between his suggestion of going out and John’s date. The four different codes used to analyse this scene are facial expressions, music, dialogue, and heteronormativity.

The facial expressions in this scene in connection to the dialogue, as discussed below, support reading Sherlock as queer. When John enters the living room, Sherlock is exasperatingly ruffling his hair. When he suggests they should go out, he nonchalantly looks into the opposite direction, not making eye contact with John, as if thinking he does not need to see John’s reaction because John will agree. However, John tells him about his date and smiles contently. So Sherlock looks at him in disbelief, his nose wrinkled. When John explains what a date is, he looks to the side, as if he cannot believe that Sherlock does not know what a date is. Sherlock looks confused after this explanation and does not make eye contact, again, when he says he was suggesting a date as well. John looks at the ceiling and then smiles as if asking himself if Sherlock is joking and then deciding it must have been a joke. When he adds, “At least, I hope not” (“The Blind Banker”), he puts his head to the side and looks at Sherlock questioningly.

Sherlock’s facial expressions suggest that he really is asking John out because he cannot look at him, which suggests he is nervous. Furthermore, John is unsure if Sherlock is joking or not, as suggested by his facial expressions, so he thinks Sherlock might be interested in him romantically. This means that Sherlock can be read as queer. John, on the other hand, does not welcome the suggestion of a date, which goes against the reading introduced in the last part of this chapter, but might be explained when considering his homosexual panic.

Another factor which supports a queer reading of Sherlock is the music. In the scene, it fits to the genre of crime rather than to the genre of romance. It is the music which is frequently played when Sherlock and John are hunting a criminal or when Sherlock is solving a case by making deductions. This can be explained by the fact that, before John enters, Sherlock is going through different books trying to crack the code. One possible interpretation for the music continuing through Sherlock and John’s conversation is that Sherlock sees the date he suggests as part of solving the case

and does not see the romantic implications of the word. Another valid interpretation, however, is that a romantic date for Sherlock and John would be to solve a case, since Sherlock states in “A Study in Pink” that he is interested in his work, not in romance. He would, should he fall in love with someone, try to connect work and romance. Therefore, solving a case could be understood by Sherlock as a romantic date.

The dialogue certainly is the most interesting facet to analyse, similar to the scene discussed above. Sherlock and John exchange a few brief lines.

SHERLOCK: I need to get some air. We're going out tonight.

JOHN: Actually, I've got a date.

SHERLOCK: What?

JOHN: Where two people who like each other go out and have fun.

SHERLOCK: That's what I was suggesting.

JOHN: No it wasn't. At least, I hope not. (“The Blind Banker”)

John defines a date as a get-together of two people who enjoy each other's company. Due to this vague definition, Sherlock fails to see the difference between what he is suggesting and John's plans. Sherlock likes John and John likes Sherlock, and Sherlock thinks solving cases is fun, so why should going out together and hunting a criminal not be a date? John, however, understands a date as something which two people, who are romantically interested in one another, do in order to have fun and to get to know each other better. This explains his defensive attitude when he says he hopes Sherlock is not suggesting a date between them because he is not romantically and/or sexually interested in his flatmate.

This reading is plausible, but there is also another one. Sherlock does, in fact, want to go on a romantic date with John and he is suggesting it. This is supported by the fact that, later in the episode, he joins John and Sarah on their date, telling John he is working on the case while being unfriendly and mean to Sarah, who can be read as Sherlock's rival. Moreover, John is still so unsure in his relationship with Sherlock that he cannot say if Sherlock is asking him out or not, so he feels the need to make it clear once again that he is not interested in having a relationship with his flatmate. This example is in favour of Sherlock's ambiguous sexuality, as discussed in the Introduction, and in support of reading the character of Sherlock as queer.

The scene also devotes emphasis to the heteronormativity inherent in our society. John clearly operates under heteronormative assumptions: a date is “[w]here two people who like each other go out and have fun” (“The Blind Banker”). He does not mention a specific gender, he does not say “where a man and a woman who like each other”; he uses the term “people”. However, as soon as Sherlock suggests that this

definition of date can be applied to him and John going out together, John backs away. Sherlock, who notices John's vague definition, immediately creates a loophole for a safe environment to ask John out, rightly assuming that a date does not have to be between a man and a woman, as John was suggesting with the use of the word "people".

Moreover, in the previous scene, John asks out Sarah who drops subtle hints that she is interested in dating him. Similar to John's behaviour in the conversation in "A Study in Pink" discussed above, she tries to find out if John has a girlfriend. In connection to the scene which follows it, this exchange is heteronormative insofar that it is a man's job to ask out the woman. Even though Sarah is interested in John, she waits for John to ask her out while dropping hints, even though nothing goes against her asking him.

Since the scenes of John asking out Sarah and Sherlock asking out John are similar, the latter can be read as an example of Sherlock being interested romantically and/or sexually in John and asking him out and John stating he is not interested in Sherlock. In this case, it can be argued that Sherlock is not straight, but John is. John also seems annoyed at Sherlock suggesting a date between them when he goes to great lengths in "A Study in Pink" to assure Angelo he is not Sherlock's date. Everything in this scene points to John being the subject of homosexual panic. He puts his head to the side questioningly when he says, "At least, I hope not", suggesting he is unsure of how to react to what he perceives to be Sherlock asking him out. Even though he is vague in his definition of the term date, he panics at the thought of Sherlock asking him out when he says he hopes Sherlock is not suggesting one. Rather, he wants to make it clear that he is going out with Sarah with whom he is shown flirting in the previous scene.

As was mentioned in Chapter 2, it is possible to argue that John is bisexual. So far, however, the evidence presented in this subchapter seems to contradict this reading. John does not only reject Sherlock's advances, he also expresses emotions akin to homosexual panic. This character trait becomes less and less distinct as the show progresses. Whereas John in Series 1 and 2 is still concerned about assuring people he is not Sherlock's date, he proclaims, "I don't mind," after touching Sherlock's knee in Series 3. This scene will be discussed in great detail in Chapter 6.

In Chapter 2, Fiske's concept of male television was introduced. Fiske (212) writes about male bonding being goal orientated rather than relationship orientated. This can be observed for Series 1 of *Sherlock*. John and Sherlock are introduced to one another because they are both looking for cheap accommodation. The goal here is to find an affordable living space. Later, John starts writing a blog about his adventures with

Sherlock: Sherlock solves the crimes and John blogs about them, which brings new clients to Sherlock. Again, their relationship is goal orientated. This is further supported by John calling himself Sherlock's colleague in "The Blind Banker", as mentioned above. Their working relationship is only gradually expanded by forging an emotional bond, which culminates in John offering to sacrifice himself at the end of "The Great Game", so Sherlock can live. From then on, *Sherlock* also shows traits of female television, as defined by Fiske, which will be further discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 6 explains how female television is more open to relationship concepts which differ from a heterosexual relationship. Therefore, *Sherlock* displaying traits of female television supports a possible queering of the relationship between Sherlock and John.

Another aspect of male television is the absence of women from the narrative (Fiske 204). In *Sherlock*, women are not absent, but they do not have much agency. Therefore, the next important topic to be discussed is the portrayal of women and family.

4.3 Family and Women

Both family and women are seen as a burden for men in male television (201). Both also do not play a significant role in *Sherlock*, at least not in Series 1.

In Chapter 2, Kosofsky Sedgwick's analysis of the family in *A Sentimental Journey* was introduced. In this context, it is important to look beyond the bourgeois concept of family consisting of father, mother, and child. Such a family does not appear in *Sherlock* until Series 3. Other family concepts, however, do, but none of them seems to be fully functional.

First of all, it can be argued that siblings can also form a family. Both Sherlock and John have siblings: John has a sister, Mary, who was introduced above, and Sherlock has a brother, Mycroft. Neither John nor Sherlock like their siblings. John disapproves of his sister because she is an alcoholic, and Sherlock thinks of Mycroft as his archenemy. Furthermore, John deduces a sibling rivalry between Sherlock and his brother in "The Great Game". Mycroft, on the other hand, cares for Sherlock and even offers John money to spy on his brother in "A Study in Pink", presumably to ensure he does not take drugs again, which he does prior to the first episode.

Considering that neither John nor Sherlock are fond of their siblings, it is possible to argue that they see each other as brothers. Such a connection between them is never explicitly mentioned, but there are various indicators that it is unusual for both of them to be so close to another human being.

In “A Study in Pink” when John meets Mycroft for the first time, Mycroft observes that John has trust issues. “Could it be that you’ve decided to trust Sherlock Holmes of all people?” he asks when John refuses to spy on Sherlock. Mycroft also remarks that John does not seem to make friends easily, but he nevertheless moves in with Sherlock 24 hours after he has met him for the first time. John, who is not fond of his sister and whose parents are never mentioned (they do not even appear at his wedding in Series 3), creates a bond with Sherlock, a man he has just met. He is not even intimidated by Mycroft abducting him. It is possible to argue, therefore, that John wants to create a bond in one form or another with Sherlock. In other words, it is established from the beginning that Sherlock and John’s relationship (homosocial or other) is special and unique, considering that all other relationships fail, as was shown above and as is further analysed below. This makes their relationship even more special and unique.

Sherlock is similar to John when it comes to contact with other people. On their first evening together, Sherlock takes John to visit a crime scene. There, they meet Sergeant Sally Donovan, a police officer, to whom Sherlock introduces John as a “[c]olleague of mine”. Donovan exclaims in disbelief, “A colleague? How do *you* get a colleague?” (“A Study in Pink”). Just as Mycroft is surprised by John trusting Sherlock, Donovan is surprised by Sherlock finding someone who would want to be his colleague. And similar to John, Sherlock also is alone: he does not like his brother, his parents do not make an appearance until Series 3, and he does not have any friends or colleagues, as shown by Donovan’s reaction. The only person he likes is his landlady, Mrs Hudson, whom he shows affection for when he shows John the flat at 221B Baker Street.

In arguing that Sherlock and John are forging a bond in the absence of a family, the suggestion by Kosofsky Sedgwick of going beyond the bourgeois family is applied. Sherlock and John do feel the need for closeness to another human being; otherwise, they would not decide to live and work together. This behaviour is also unusual for them, as is evidenced by the reactions of the people surrounding them. The bond between Sherlock and John grows with each episode. It is formed out of necessity, but later, it becomes obvious that it is strengthened through friendship and the will to sacrifice oneself to save the other. Later, Sherlock and John are even co-dependent on the other, as will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Like relationships mentioned above, other family bonds are just as fragile and unhealthy. In “The Blind Banker”, Soo Lin Yao, a Chinese woman who helps Sherlock crack the book code, is killed by her brother, who works for the smuggler ring. She

was also part of the ring after she and her brother lost their parents, but she tried to leave this life behind. Connie and Kenny Prince in “The Great Game”, as mentioned above, also do not have a healthy relationship. She has a makeover show on television and humiliates her brother on a weekly basis in front of the audience. When he complains and she threatens to disinherit him, she is killed by her brother’s lover. In “The Great Game”, John investigates the death of one of Mycroft’s employees, Andrew West, who was killed by his prospective brother-in-law. This brother-in-law is shown caring for his sister, West’s fiancée, but is also responsible for the death of her future husband. Finally, in “A Study in Pink”, there is a family which consists of father, mother, and children, albeit a ruined one. The murderer is divorced and his ex-wife does not want him to see his children. He commits murders because for every person he kills, his children receive money from Moriarty. Again, murder and death are connected to the topic of family.

In Series 1, each family relation, apart from John and Sherlock’s, is connected to murder and death. Even the only bourgeois family is not excluded from this. Using Fiske, it can be argued that a negative portrayal of family relations is a trait of female television. Fiske (180) argues that marriage is subjected to disturbances to create an interesting story. The same can be observed here. Without siblings killing each other or parents killing for their children, there would be no story. The ruined families create an opportunity for Sherlock and John to hunt criminals. However, there is not one functional family in Series 1, not one positive example of parents caring for their children or siblings caring for each other.

Instead, bonds are forged in the absence of families, for example a bond between Sherlock, John, and their landlady Mrs Hudson. Mrs Hudson cares for both beyond the duties of a landlady. She offers John tea and biscuits in “A Study in Pink”, she brings John snacks when he comes home with his date Sarah to discover that the kitchen is empty in “The Blind Banker”, and she even does the shopping for them in “The Great Game”. It is possible to argue that Mrs Hudson behaves like a mother toward Sherlock and John. With them as her children, the three have created an unconventional family.

Mrs Hudson is also a recurring character in the original stories, where she is not only Holmes’ landlady, but also his housekeeper. She cooks and cleans for him, something which Mrs Hudson in *Sherlock* rejects initially, but is willing to do as the story progresses. However, there are also women in *Sherlock* who are not present in the original stories, which leads to a discussion of how women are treated by the narrative.

As was mentioned in Chapter 2, almost every woman in *Sherlock* is portrayed in a negative light and is used merely as a device to advance the story of the male characters. The connection between homosexuality and the treatment of women in the show is justified because the “suppression of the homosexual component of human sexuality, and by corollary, the oppression of homosexuals, is [...] a product of the same system whose rules and relations oppress women” (Rubin 180). Rubin argues that gender divides labour (men have to earn money, women are responsible for the household), and that this division creates a heterosexual system. This system cannot be upheld by a same-sex relationship because it is problematic to point out that one is the man and one is the woman. In doing so, homosexual relationships are oppressed by an outdated system, which demands of men to earn money and of women to stay at home. Moreover, “[g]ender is not only an identification with one sex; it also entails that sexual desire be directed toward the other sex” (Rubin 180). This means a woman cannot be in a relationship with another woman because women are responsible for the household and none of them would go to work. At the same time, a man cannot be in a relationship with another man because then neither one of them would clean and cook. Women and homosexuals are oppressed by the same system because they are forced into specific roles.

Before turning to the subject of women, it is important to point out that, following this definition of the division of labour, John acts very much like a housewife in Series 1. Sherlock earns money (he solves cases), but John is unemployed. At the beginning of “The Blind Banker”, he is shown doing the shopping for him and Sherlock, and when he is unable to pay because the machine rejects his card, Sherlock offers him his. However, when looking closer at Rubin, it becomes obvious that this system should not be applied in this instance because it oppresses homosexual relationships by applying outdated heterosexual standards. Women are also oppressed by this system which tells them they have to stay at home while the men works and earn money.

In *Sherlock*, the reoccurring female characters are all employed. Nevertheless, the men treat them however they please. Men negotiate their spaces and relationships to one another over the ruin of women. In Series 1, there are 12 women who have lines and/or a name. Because it would go beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss each woman in detail, just a few examples are discussed to show their negative portrayal.

The first woman of importance is Sergeant Sally Donovan, who does not appear in the original stories. She is not only one of the few people of colour in the show, she also works for the police in a position which is demanding. However, Sally is portrayed in a negative light. First of all, the audience is encouraged to dislike her because she does

not like Sherlock. She calls him “freak” in “A Study in Pink” and tries to convince John to stop being friends with Sherlock in “The Great Game”. She is also having an affair with Anderson, a married man, which Sherlock uses to insult both her and Anderson in “A Study in Pink”.

When Sally is introduced, it is a dark, rainy evening, but she is wearing a short skirt. According to the *Metropolitan Police Dress Code and Appearance Standard Operating Procedures*, “female staff may wear either trousers or a skirt at their discretion”. Sally is allowed to wear a skirt if she pleases. However, it is also important to point out that, according to the *Dress Code Policy*, “standard of dress should be smart, fit for the purpose and portray a favourable impression of the service”. Wearing a tight, short skirt to a crime scene is not “fit for the purpose”. Sally wears a skirt so Sherlock can deduce that she and Anderson are having an affair by looking at her knees. How she dresses is treated as a plot device, as well as emphasising that she is a woman by setting her apart from the other officers. She is not only portrayed in a negative light by being shown to make derogatory remarks about Sherlock, it is also emphasised by her clothes that she is different from the male police officers present at the scene. Sally Donovan is an example for how a female character is treated badly by both the narrative and the titular male character because she dresses so she looks nice and to give the (male) audience something to look at. Her dress is also used as a plot device: by wearing a short skirt, Sherlock can deduce she is having an affair and therefore put Anderson in a bad light. Here, a woman is used as a plot device to portray a man badly.

Another woman who is treated badly by the narrative and who also does not appear in the original stories is Molly Hooper. Like Donovan, she is a well-educated woman. She is a pathologist at St. Bart’s Hospital where Sherlock and John first meet. However, Molly is attracted to Sherlock and this attraction is portrayed as a character flaw. She has no other characteristics which define her despite her feelings for Sherlock and she is also easily manipulated by him. This is another example of how female characters are portrayed in a negative light, as her attraction makes her a weak and easily to manipulate character.

When she is first introduced in “A Study in Pink”, she tries to ask Sherlock out on a date by asking if he would like “to have coffee”. Sherlock understands this as her asking if she should make him coffee and answers, “[b]lack, two sugars, please. I’ll be upstairs”. He also notices that she is wearing lipstick. Later, when John is introduced to Sherlock, Molly enters, carrying a cup of coffee for Sherlock; the lipstick is gone. Sherlock notices this and remarks, “What happened to the lipstick?” to which Molly

replies that she does not think it is working for her. Sherlock contradicts her: "I thought it was a big improvement. Your mouth's too small now". This is not the only instance where Sherlock makes a snide remark about Molly's looks. Another scene will be discussed in Chapter 5.

As was mentioned above, Sherlock does not think much of relationships and prefers to focus on his work. It is therefore not surprising that he does not recognise Molly's advances for what they are. In "The Blind Banker", however, it becomes obvious that Sherlock is aware of Molly's feelings for him and he uses them to get a favour out of her by complimenting her looks. Molly lets herself be manipulated into helping Sherlock. Sherlock, therefore, is fully aware when people are romantically interested in him and he knows how to manipulate them to get what he wants. Molly and Sally being attacked for their looks or their gender by Sherlock are just two examples of Sherlock treating women badly. This theme is also present in every series, but it becomes especially obvious in Series 2, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

In "The Great Game", Molly tries to make Sherlock jealous by introducing her boyfriend Jim to him. Her attempt fails because Sherlock deduces that Jim must be gay because of his underwear, because he has a high level of personal grooming, and because he leaves his phone number where Sherlock will find it. Molly is extremely upset by Sherlock's deductions, accusing him of spoiling everything before storming out of the room. As is later revealed, Jim is actually Moriarty, the main villain in Series 1 and 2. The dynamics between Sherlock and Moriarty are the focus of the final part of this chapter.

4.4 The Hero and the Villain

In her article "Terror, Nostalgia, and the Pursuit of Sherlock Holmes in *Sherlock*", Harrington discusses the relationship between Sherlock and Moriarty. She does not see it entirely as something positive because she writes that the show, "capitalizes on the pairing of Sherlock and Moriarty, bringing the eroticism of their death-duel into the very dialogue" (77). Sherlock seems to be interested in Moriarty intellectually, which is also the basis for Moriarty's interest in Sherlock. However, Moriarty also openly flirts with Sherlock, opening up a possibility for a romantic and/or sexual relationship between the two characters. What Harrington observes is that, "Moriarty's 'flirtation' with Sherlock is obviously gratifying to both men, more so because of the high stakes involved in their intellectual joust" (77).

All in all, Harrington regards Moriarty's queerness as a plot device. "Moriarty's very outrageousness, a marker of a kind of caricatured queer identity, reminds the viewer of Sherlock's queerness, an uncertain identity that he never fully reveals" (77). Moriarty's queerness, then, is not entirely negative since it has the function of drawing attention to Sherlock's queerness, which could be vital in opening up the show to a queer possibility. Sherlock's queerness is further emphasised by the fact that he never talks about his sexual orientation. He only states he would like to focus on his work in "A Study in Pink", but other than that he never discusses the topic.

As was mentioned above, Moriarty first appears as a gay man. It is not just Sherlock who comments on this, it is also Moriarty himself who states that he was, "[p]laying gay" ("The Great Game"). One explanation for this deception is that Sherlock frequently fails in his deductions when he is confronted with sexuality. In "A Study in Pink", he assumes that John has a brother because the name he learns is Harry and because this Harry is married to a person named Clara. He is annoyed with himself when John points out that "Harry's short for Harriet" ("A Study in Pink"). Moriarty playing gay, then, could function as a distraction for Sherlock. Kustritz and Kohnen (88) point out that the "one type of deduction Sherlock repeatedly miscalculates involves sexuality, both because of his reliance on heteronormativity and social stereotype and because of his own sexual nonconformity". It is therefore not surprising that Sherlock would assume a man who has a high level of personal grooming and who wears flashy underwear is gay. His powers of deduction are not as brilliant as he wants to make everyone believe when he fails to deduce that he is looking at Moriarty and not Molly's gay boyfriend, just because Moriarty plays gay for him.

However, Moriarty's queerness does not end with their first meeting. Later, at the climax of the episode and the series, Moriarty openly flirts with Sherlock by saying things like "[i]s that a British Army Browning L9A1 in your pocket, or are you just pleased to see me?" and "Daddy's had enough now" to Sherlock ("The Great Game"). Sherlock replies to the question by saying, "[b]oth" while pulling out the gun. Sherlock seems to be aroused in one way or another by this game Moriarty is playing with him. His arousal points to the queerness of his character, since it is a man who evokes this state in him.

In Chapter 2, Kosofsky Sedgwick's discussion of *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* was introduced by arguing that Moriarty can be read as Robert, but also as Gil-Martin. Sherlock, then, is either George or Robert. Moriarty is Robert because he fails to desire women. Even when he pretends to be in a relationship with a woman, he acts gay to distract Sherlock. He also throws himself at

Sherlock, craving the detective's attention by giving him cases to solve while threatening to kill innocent people should Sherlock fail. Sherlock, albeit not openly desiring women himself, is nevertheless integrated in a network of friends and colleagues during "The Great Game", consisting of John, Molly, and even Inspector Lestrade from Scotland Yard. They help him to solve the cases Moriarty gives him.

However, it is also possible to read Sherlock as Robert because he, too, fails at desiring women. In "A Study in Pink", he refers to girlfriends as "not really my area" and states that he is married to his work. In all three episodes, he never gives the impression of being interested in a woman sexually and/or romantically. Moreover, there are various similarities between Sherlock and Moriarty, which connects Sherlock to Robert, assuming Moriarty can also be read as Robert.

They are both outstandingly intelligent. Sherlock refers to himself as a consulting detective. He uses his intelligence to help his clients solve crimes. Moriarty prefers the expression consulting criminal. He uses his intelligence to help his clients commit crimes. Scott-Zechlin (64) remarks that "[w]ithout John to guide him, Sherlock *is* Moriarty – inhuman and indifferent, caring only about puzzles and never people". Without John, Sherlock's Robert could turn into Moriarty's Gil-Martin, committing the crimes he likes to solve.

Moriarty does not have someone like John at his side; he works alone. Sherlock, on the other hand, can rely on John to tell him when it is inappropriate to giggle at a crime scene or when Sherlock is too absorbed in solving the puzzle, forgetting that there are lives in danger. Through Moriarty, Sherlock also discovers his fear of losing John. "[I]t is made clear in the final confrontation between Moriarty and Sherlock that Sherlock's one weakness is John, because John is the only person whose endangerment finally makes Sherlock visibly upset" (Scott-Zechlin 63f.). Caring about John is the most prominent aspect which makes Sherlock different from Moriarty.

Moriarty, through his queerness, does not only draw put emphasis on Sherlock's own queerness, as argued by Harrington; his actions also make Sherlock realise how much he cares for John. This caring is framed by queerness when John does not know how to cope with Sherlock's attempt to thank him.

SHERLOCK: That, er ... thing that you ... that you did, that, um ... you offered to do ... that was, um ... good.

JOHN: I'm glad no-one saw that.

SHERLOCK: Mm?

JOHN: You ripping my clothes off in a darkened swimming pool. People might talk.

SHERLOCK: They do little else. ("The Great Game")

Sherlock tries to thank John for offering to sacrifice himself in order for Sherlock to be able to escape from Moriarty. It is likely the first time in Sherlock's life that someone offered to do something so noble for him since he does not appear to have had any friends prior to John, and Sherlock wants to thank him. However, John does not know how to cope with this situation; after all, he was abducted by Moriarty and had to wear a bomb, which Sherlock rips off as soon as Moriarty vanishes. John therefore makes a joke about people assuming they are a couple to lighten the mood. It can be called a joke because John's goal in saying it is to make Sherlock laugh and distract from the gravity of the situation they are in. Even during the finale when their lives are at stake, a queer possibility is foregrounded, triggered through Moriarty's endangering of John, and Sherlock realising John is the only person he is scared of losing.

To summarise the analysis of Series 1, it is important to discuss two aspects: how the television codes used imply romance between Sherlock and John and how the sexual orientations of the main characters can be read.

In the scene from "A Study in Pink", it is possible to argue, by analysing the codes, that there is a romantic scene taking place between Sherlock and John, something similar to the date Angelo suggests when they walk into his restaurant. John is more open to entering into a romantic relationship than Sherlock is. His behaviour toward his new flatmate is open, relaxed, and calm, which is at odds with how the character is painted throughout the rest of the episode. John undoubtedly treats Sherlock differently than the other people in his life. How the camera is used also suggests romance because the shot size is mostly medium close-up, suggesting that Sherlock and John are having an intimate conversation only 24 hours after their first meeting. Moreover, even though John says he is not interested in dating Sherlock (but only after Sherlock rejects what he reads as John expressing desire in a romantic and/or sexual relationship) and even though Sherlock says he wants to focus on his work, their sexuality is left open to any reading the audience prefers. Analysing behaviour, camera, and how sexuality is treated in this scene, it is possible to argue that John expresses interest in entering into a romantic and/or sexual relationship with Sherlock, therefore making a queer reading feasible.

The only factor which speaks against such a reading (at least partly) is the dialogue. Even here a queer reading cannot be dismissed entirely. John continues to ask after Sherlock's relationship status, thereby revealing he is aware that there are more sexual orientations than just heterosexual, until Sherlock puts an end to the conversation. Only then does John say he is not interested in Sherlock. Saying he is not Sherlock's date when Angelo suggests this could mean he is scared of revealing

his sexuality. Therefore, a queer reading can be applied to the dialogue and still be proven to be feasible.

In the scene from “The Blind Banker”, the roles of Sherlock and John are reversed. Here, facial expressions, music, and dialogue can be read as suggesting a queer Sherlock but a heterosexual John. Sherlock’s facial expressions indicate nervousness, which speaks for him asking John out. The music can be read as romantic when taking into account that Sherlock is more interested in solving cases than in relationships. The dialogue can be read as Sherlock asking John out on a date.

Here, the only factor which speaks against a queer reading is heteronormativity. John is vague in his definition of the term date, but then backs away when Sherlock points out that two men can go on a date. John sees his masculinity threatened. He believes that a man has to ask out a woman (as becomes evident when taking the scene prior to the analysed one into account), and sees himself in the role of a woman when Sherlock asks him out. This reading is also supported by the fact that John, at the beginning of the episode, behaves like a housewife. He wants to defend his masculinity and therefore reacts dismissive when Sherlock asks him out.

The sexual orientation of Sherlock and John is left open to interpretation by Series 1. John only ever denies being Sherlock’s date and Sherlock does not address this subject at all. Sherlock, especially when taking Moriarty into account, can be read as queer, John can be read as either heterosexual or bisexual. He is undeniably attracted to Sherlock in one way or another. His behaviour in the scene from “A Study in Pink” suggests romantic and/or sexual attraction, his behaviour in the scene from “The Blind Banker” homosocial attraction.

What is, however, in the way of anticipating a queering of the relationship between Sherlock and John in the future is how characters who are not white, male, and (presumably) straight are treated by the narrative. Most women, people of colour, and queer characters are reduced to stereotypes or function as a plot device. It is also possible to read the scenes discussed above as queerbaiting. There are hints that Sherlock and John could be queer, but it is not made explicit by the narrative. This is just as problematic as the negative treatment of women because through queerbaiting, a queer audience is gained but not represented by the narrative, just as women are present, but reduced to stereotypes. In the following two chapters, it will be shown that the representation of women, people of colour, and queer characters improves in each series, slowly opening up the world in which *Sherlock* is set to allow a queer relationship between Sherlock and John to be made explicit by the narrative.

After Series 1, it is impossible to determine Sherlock's sexual orientation, but he can be read as queer, and it is possible to read John as either heterosexual or bisexual, and the narrative teases at a possible queering of the relationship without making it explicit, but yet allowing a queer reading to be feasible. The following chapter will show that there is a gradual development toward making a queer relationship between Sherlock and John explicit.

5 Series 2

Similar to Chapter 4, this chapter will analyse the second series of *Sherlock*, again applying the same criteria, namely relationships in general and especially the relationship between John and Sherlock, homosexual panic in the character John Watson, the portrayal of family and women, and the relationship between Sherlock and Moriarty.

Firstly, a scene from "The Hounds of Baskerville" is analysed to show how the question of whether Sherlock and John are a couple is still frequently raised. This part also draws attention to the fact that the two queer relationships represented in this series are functioning, whereas the straight relationships fail. Moreover, it is argued that *Sherlock* is set in a world in which homophobia seems to be non-existent. Then a scene from "A Scandal in Belgravia" is analysed to show John's defensive stance when the question of whether he and Sherlock are a couple is raised to illustrate how John still suffers from homosexual panic, despite the absence of homophobia. This analysis also introduces the character of Irene Adler, who, in *Sherlock*, is a lesbian dominatrix.

Irene Adler is discussed at length in the third part of the chapter which continues the discussion of how women are treated on the show. By using Irene Adler for the analysis, it can also be argued that queer characters are not portrayed in a positive light by the narrative. This part also argues that Sherlock is a sexist character, which is illustrated by giving examples. The argument of Sherlock, John, and Mrs Hudson forming a family is further expanded here as well. Finally, the relationship between Sherlock and Moriarty is analysed again, building on what was said in Chapter 4 and showing how Moriarty forces Sherlock to face his feelings for John.

5.1 Relationships

At the beginning of Series 2, after the situation with Moriarty is resolved, Sherlock and John are seen working together as a team. There is a montage of them solving crimes; John seems to have resigned his job at the clinic to assist Sherlock. Every time Sherlock sees a client, John is there to take notes, and when the case is solved, he

blogs about it, which brings Sherlock more clients. Their working relationship seems to be fully developed at this point, but their emotional bond is still only half-formed. Therefore, in the second episode, Sherlock is able to hurt John by saying he does not have any friends, which he later regrets. He apologises to John, saying, “[l]isten, what I said before, John, I meant it. I don’t have friends. I’ve just got one” (“The Hounds of Baskerville”). Finally, in “The Reichenbach Fall”, Sherlock is willing to sacrifice his reputation and his life for John’s safety, faking his death in front of John’s eyes and leaving the only person he considers to be his friend believing he invented Moriarty and was forced to commit suicide by a newspaper uncovering this story.

Over the course of the series, John also tries to have relationships with women. In “A Scandal in Belgravia”, it is revealed that John has had various girlfriends between Sarah and his current girlfriend Jeanette. Sherlock has difficulties remembering them all, but so does John. He offers Jeanette to walk her dog for her as a form of apology, realising too late he is confusing her with his previous girlfriend. Jeanette, who is angry about the way John is treating her, tells him, “You’re a great boyfriend [...] And Sherlock Holmes is a very lucky man” (“A Scandal in Belgravia”).

She is right because the reason for John’s relationships failing constantly is Sherlock. During Sherlock and John’s first meeting with Irene Adler, Sherlock deduces that John has a date later on the same day, to which he does not go because Sherlock is drugged by Irene and John stays at home to take care of him. It might not be surprising that Sherlock has difficulties telling John’s girlfriends apart, but John confusing them himself raises the question of why he cares so little about maintaining a relationship despite him entering into a new one so frequently. On the one hand, John could either see his homosocial bond with Sherlock of greater importance in his life than his heterosexual bonds with women, and therefore he prefers Sherlock’s company over the company of his girlfriends. On the other hand, John could also have romantic and/or sexual feelings for Sherlock, but does not want to act on them because he thinks Sherlock is not interested in him due to the conversation from “A Study in Pink”, so he enters into a number of heterosexual relationships instead to distract him from the fact that Sherlock is not interested in him. In order for this reading to be feasible, John has to be read as bisexual. The second possibility supports a queer reading of the character John Watson.

Moreover, the topic of Sherlock and John being a couple comes up again in all three episodes, 11 times in total. One instance, from “The Hounds of Baskerville”, is analysed using Fiske’s television codes to give another example of why a queer reading is feasible. In this scene, John books a room in an inn for himself and Sherlock.

The inn is run by two men, Gary and Billy, who are in a relationship with each other. They assume that Sherlock and John are a couple as well, which leads to John denying this. The discussion focuses on four aspects: appearance, lighting, dialogue, and queerness.

In this scene, three characters are talking: John, Gary, and Billy. At the beginning, a dialogue develops between John and Gary. Gary assumes that John and Sherlock are on holiday together and he apologises for not being able to give them a double room. At this point, John and the audience do not know that Gary is in a relationship with a man. Considering the stereotypical representation of queer characters in the first series, it is not surprising that John does not suspect anything. Gary is a tall man with a beard and a potbelly wearing a plaid shirt. He does not show any of the indicators of what a gay man has to look like, as introduced by Sherlock in "The Great Game". He neither has a high level of personal grooming, nor is he shown wearing flashy underwear. Moreover, he does not talk in an artificially high, exaggerated voice like Moriarty when he first meets Sherlock, and he does not use flamboyant hand gestures, like Kenny Prince, all signs of a stereotypical portrayal of gay men. Only when John and Gary are joined by Billy, a smaller man with a higher voice, wearing a cook's uniform and a scarf, John begins to suspect something. Billy has a more dramatic way of speaking, setting him apart from Gary's down-to-earthness. When Gary puts his arm around Billy, John and the audience finally realise that the two are a couple which is then further emphasised by the friendly banter they engage in. Still, neither Gary nor Billy are as obviously gay as Moriarty's caricature in "The Great Game", making it more difficult for John to guess their sexual orientation, and showing the audience that not every queer man has to be as flamboyant and flashy as Moriarty is during his first appearance, that, in fact, this is just a crude caricature of a queer man and that it is almost impossible to tell someone's sexual orientation from just looking at them. By devoting emphasis to this, the show points to the fact that Sherlock and John can be read as queer because queer men do not have to look like Moriarty's caricature. Neither Sherlock nor John conform to the stereotype of a gay man as introduced in "The Great Game"; but neither do Gary and Billy.

Fiske, in analysing a scene from *Hart to Hart*, writes that the "hero's cabin is lit in a soft, yellowish light" as opposed to the harsher lighting in the villain's cabin (8). The lighting in the scene at hand is warm and welcoming. Despite it being the middle of the day, every lamp shown in the shots is lit to lighten up the surroundings. Through this, the inn appears to be a welcoming place, which is also emphasised by Gary's openness: he immediately engages in a conversation with John, answering questions John has about the surrounding moor. Both Billy and Gary as well as their inn are

warm and hospitable, inviting John through brightness and friendly conversation. Through this, queer people are portrayed to be just people. Their inn is friendly and there is nothing hostile or freakish about it, underlining that there is also nothing hostile or freakish about queer people.

Again, the dialogue is the most interesting feature to analyse. Sherlock and John are not shown interacting in the inn. When Sherlock enters, John is already taking the keys to their room from Gary. In fact, there is no sign that Sherlock and John are booking into the inn together, except that John must have asked for either two rooms or a double room. Nevertheless, Gary says, “sorry we couldn’t do a double room for you boys” to which John replies, “[t]hat’s fine. We’re not ...,” but stops when he sees Gary smiling warmly and understandingly at him. After this, John and Gary talk about the moor and the monster dog John and Sherlock are investigating until Billy enters. Here, the dialogue turns back to the subject of John and Sherlock being a couple.

BILLY: What with the monster and the ruddy prison, I don’t know how we sleep nights, do you, Gary?

GARY: Like a baby.

BILLY: That’s not true. He’s a snorer.

GARY Hey! Shh.

BILLY: Is yours a snorer?

JOHN: Got any crisps? (“The Hounds of Baskerville”)

Billy also assumes that John and Sherlock are a couple without having observed them interacting. In fact, he does not even know that John is here with another person because he is not present when John books into the inn. Nevertheless, the writers draw attention to the fact that John and Sherlock could be a couple. This is the second time in just a few minutes that John is forced to deny that he and Sherlock are a couple. Instead of answering Billy’s question, John decides to act as if he did not hear him and asks for crisps. This is delivered like the punchline to a joke because the camera then cuts away without revealing how Billy and Gary answer the question. Through this scene, queer people are portrayed as nice, friendly, and normal, but the show still shies away from queering its main characters, instead using a joke to escape an uncomfortable situation in which questions about their sexuality are raised.

Queer characters in Series 1, as discussed in Chapter 4, are not represented positively. However, Gary and Billy in “The Hounds of Baskerville” are a positive representation of queerness. It is later revealed that they bought a dog and set it loose on the moor to capitalise on the story about the monster hound, but apart from this small incident, their story is positive since it does not end in divorce or murder. Moreover, they are represented as well-rounded characters who are not reduced to

mere stereotypes. Kim argues that the “innkeepers could have been anyone, but Mark Gatiss wrote them as a gay couple, increasing the visibility of gay characters” (131). This is a valid point. The representation is neither stereotypical nor negative; Billy and Gary are simply two men who run an inn and who happen to be a couple.

A positive treatment of a queer relationship such as this does much more to increase the visibility of queer identities than the occasional joke about Sherlock and John being a couple. Moreover, it produces space for further queer possibilities by creating an environment in which queer people are not treated as freaks or outcasts.

Kim also writes about homophobia in our society, saying “[w]e remember it’s a dangerous world in which to be gay because of Gary’s knowing smile of subculture kinship when he thinks John is being closeted: he is signaling you are safe here. There is no need to hide. John Watson’s decision to fall silent, mid-denial, is a profound tribute to that reality” (133). With this statement, Kim implies that homophobia exists in the world in which *Sherlock* is set. However, the audience cannot tell why John and Sherlock should have to hide their relationship because, contrary to what Kim suggests, there is no homophobia in *Sherlock*. There is only one instance of a homophobic incident. Dr Mortimer, their client’s therapist in “The Hounds of Baskerville”, reacts negatively when she finds out that John and Sherlock could be in a relationship. She does not react in this way because she is angry with John for flirting with her despite being in a relationship, she is angry with him for liking men. This is evidenced by her making a snide remark, telling John he should buy another man a drink. Therefore, this scene can be read as John being the subject of a homophobic incident.

Nevertheless, homophobia only appears at the margin of this episode. Therefore, it is not an issue and John and Sherlock should not be in need of a safe place to hide. Setting *Sherlock* in a world free of homophobia makes it possible to expect a queering of the two main characters.

Queer relationships in Series 2, in general, are presented in a positive light, as opposed to Series 1. Apart from Billy and Gary, the other queer relationship is Irene Adler and her assistant Kate. Admittedly, “her queer relationship gets little more than a couple of passing mentions” (Baker 54), but nevertheless also does not end in death and destruction.

However, the three heterosexual relationships all fail. The first one, John and Jeanette, was already discussed above. The second one, which is never shown on screen, is between Inspector Lestrade and his wife. During the Christmas party in “A Scandal in Belgravia”, Lestrade proudly announces that he is back together with his wife, claiming

“it’s all sorted”. This leads the audience to believe that his relationship was in danger of failing. Sherlock, however, remarks, “No, she’s sleeping with a PE teacher”. Lestrade’s relationship, therefore, is not as stable as he wants other people to believe. It can be considered a failed relationship.

Finally, Mrs Hudson has a relationship with Mr Chatterjee, a man from Pakistan. Sherlock, again, tries to ruin this relationship by telling Mrs Hudson “[h]e’s got a wife in Doncaster”. Later, when Mrs Hudson confronts Mr Chatterjee about this, Sherlock says to John, “[w]ait till she finds out about the one in Islamabad” (“The Hounds of Baskerville”). Mrs Hudson’s relationship is anything but functioning if she is dating a man who has two wives he has never told her about.

In Series 2, queer relationships are portrayed as stable, which contradicts the stereotype that only heterosexual relationships last. In *Sherlock*, this is not the case; the heterosexual relationships in Series 2 are not lasting. There is almost no homophobia in *Sherlock* and queer people are portrayed in a favourable light, which suggests that the show is open to a queer possibility for John and Sherlock. However, John also suffers from homosexual panic in Series 2.

5.2 Homosexual Panic

In Series 2, John explicitly denies or worries about being in a non-platonic relationship with Sherlock three times. One such instance in “A Scandal in Belgravia” is discussed in detail below.

During this scene, John has a conversation with Irene Adler during which he denies being gay, for the first time, and, again, being in a relationship with Sherlock. Similar to the scene from “The Hounds of Baskerville”, John is talking to a queer person. Using Fiske, the four aspects used to analyse this scene are behaviour, camera, dialogue, and sexual orientation.

In this scene, John enters Battersea power station thinking Mycroft wants to speak with him when, in fact, Irene is waiting for him to reveal that she is not dead. Therefore, when he enters the room in which his conversation with Irene is going to take place, he scans his environment in a nonchalant way while talking about Sherlock being unhappy after Irene’s death. As soon as he spots Irene, however, he is frozen in shock, unable to move or speak. From then on, he behaves in an angry, defensive way toward Irene, whereas Irene remains calm for the entirety of the scene. First, John is angry but still calm, demanding Irene should tell Sherlock she is still alive. However, he begins to shout when the subject of her frequently texting Sherlock arises. His anger is replaced by a defensive wariness when he realises Irene has been flirting with

Sherlock. This defensiveness prevails when Irene asks him if he is jealous, which leads John to state he is not gay, which is said with suppressed anger and annoyance. Finally, when Irene tells him she is gay and “[I]ook at us both”, John only huffs in resignation. The scene ends when both realise that Sherlock has been listening to them, and cuts to Sherlock leaving the room (“A Scandal in Belgravia”).

In this scene, John is undergoing different negative emotions which cause him to raise his voice. It can be said that John is angry with Irene for making Sherlock suffer. After all, Sherlock seems to be upset after he thinks that Irene is dead and John is worried about his friend. Irene, on the other hand, remains calm and calculating, due to the fact that she wants John to do her a favour, which seems to be making John even angrier. Before Irene claims that she and John are similar in their love for Sherlock, the camera creates distance between them, but then makes them equals.

In this scene, there are more close ups of John than there are of Irene. Generally speaking, the focus is on John rather than on Irene. This is done through several techniques. First of all, when there is a wide shot of John and Irene talking, it is always shot from John's perspective. The camera is positioned behind John's back, so the audience looks at Irene past John; they are on John's side. Secondly, there are close ups of John much earlier in the conversation than of Irene. Irene asks John to retrieve something for her from Sherlock, which John refuses to do. This is the first frontal close up of John. From then on, John is shot in close up, but when the camera is on Irene, it still remains in medium shot. Only when Irene starts to read the texts she has sent to Sherlock does the camera move closer. When Irene and John discuss their feelings for Sherlock, they are both shot in close up, suggesting similarities between them. John is not confronting Irene anymore; rather, they are on the same level in discussing their feelings. Finally, sometimes, the scene is shot through a black frame. When this happens, medium close-ups of John and Irene are used. However, in the course of this dialogue, John is shot four times in this way, but Irene only once.

It can be argued that John's emotions are the focus of this scene. The audience can see his face better and, as discussed above, there are more emotions to observe. Showing him this closely indicates that his emotions are crucial in this scene. John is confronted with the woman who is changing his relationship with Sherlock. Moreover, the subject of sexual orientation is discussed for the first time and it is revealed that John is not gay, but Irene is. As discussed in Chapter 4, John does not feel comfortable when confronted with his sexual orientation and he also does not like Irene, but she is the person he has to have this conversation with. The camera makes both John and

Irene equal when they talk about their feelings for Sherlock which suggests that they are both attracted to him in the same way.

At the beginning of the dialogue, the camera creates a distance between John and Irene. John is angry with Irene and by filming Irene from John's perspective, the audience takes up the same position as John, supporting him in his anger. However, when they start to discuss their feelings for Sherlock, the camera puts Irene and John on the same level, suggesting similarities between them and having the audience sympathise with both. To fully understand their conversation in this scene, it is of vital importance to analyse the dialogue.

JOHN: Tell him you're alive.

IRENE: He'd come after me.

JOHN: I'll come after you if you don't.

[...]

IRENE: Look, I made a mistake. I sent something to Sherlock for safekeeping and now I need it back, so I need your help.

JOHN: No.

IRENE: It's for his own safety.

JOHN: So is this. Tell him you're alive.

IRENE: I can't.

JOHN: Fine. I'll tell him and I still won't help you.

IRENE: What do I say?

JOHN: What do you normally say? You've texted him a lot!

IRENE: Just the usual stuff.

JOHN: There is no usual in this case.

IRENE: "Good morning. I like your funny hat." "I'm sad tonight, let's have dinner." "Hmm, you look sexy on *Crimewatch*, let's have dinner:" "I'm not hungry. Let's have dinner".

JOHN: You flirted with Sherlock Holmes?

IRENE: At him. He never replies.

JOHN: No, Sherlock always replies, to everything. He's Mr Punchline. He will outlive God trying to have the last word.

IRENE: Does that make me special?

JOHN: I don't know, maybe.

IRENE: Are you jealous?

JOHN: We're not a couple.

IRENE: Yes, you are. There. "I'm not dead. Let's have dinner."

JOHN: Who the hell knows about Sherlock Holmes, but for the record, if anyone out there still cares, I'm not actually gay.

IRENE: Well, I am. Look at us both. ("A Scandal in Belgravia")

As mentioned above, John is angry with Irene for hurting Sherlock by making him think she is dead. However, John can also be read as jealous in this scene. During the Christmas party, it is revealed that Sherlock has received at least 57 texts from Irene and that John has been counting, to which Sherlock says, "Thrilling that you've been counting" ("A Scandal in Belgravia"). John evidently does not approve of Irene texting Sherlock, something which Sherlock also realises. When the subject of her texting Sherlock comes up in the conversation above and John raises his voice, it is possible to read this as him being jealous of Irene.

His jealousy could have two reasons. John is used to living with Sherlock now and despite him dating a string of women, he would still rather spend time with Sherlock than with his girlfriends. A possible reading of this shocked, "[y]ou flirted with Sherlock Holmes?" could be that he is afraid of change. He might be scared by the idea that Irene could become Sherlock's girlfriend because it would change the dynamic between him and Sherlock. This is also a characteristic of male television, in which the male characters are escaping the bonds of marriage and relationships. If Sherlock were to date Irene, the relationship between him and John would change and John would feel left out or would see his homosocial bond with Sherlock threatened by a woman.

However, there is also another possible reading. Looking back at the conversation from "The Blind Banker" analysed in Chapter 4, this could be a continuation of John being angry with Sherlock for rejecting him in "A Study in Pink". Now he learns that Irene has been flirting with Sherlock and he does not know yet that Sherlock never replies. Sherlock tells him in "A Study in Pink" that girlfriends are "not really [his] area", but now he welcomes Irene's advances and is devastated by her apparent death. John's behaviour, therefore, can be read as him feeling hurt by Sherlock rejecting him and claiming to want to focus on his work, but now being intrigued by Irene.

Still, when the subject turns to the topic of sexual orientation, John denies that he and Sherlock are a couple and that he is gay. Nothing in the narrative so far suggests otherwise. John is not gay. He dated four women since he met Sherlock and he flirted with countless more. But when Irene asks him if he is jealous, she is not implying anything. She simply asks if John is jealous of Sherlock treating her differently, thereby threatening the homosocial bond between him and John. It is John who immediately tells her they are not a couple. Irene's "[y]es, you are," does not necessarily have to refer to them being a romantic couple. Sherlock and John live together, work together, and none of John's relationships lasts longer than a few months because he is too

attached to Sherlock. Nothing speaks against Sherlock and John being a couple, in a broader sense of the word.

When John says he is not gay, Irene remarks she is and yet she is flirting with Sherlock, a man. So John saying he is not gay does not negate the possibility of him being in love with Sherlock and feeling jealous because Sherlock treats Irene differently than him.

The topic of sexual orientation in this scene, and sexual orientation in the episode in general, is not treated as open-mindedly as Moffat and Gatiss constantly claim. This is also discussed in the next part of this chapter. Irene is a lesbian (as she identifies as gay), and John is a man who still suffers from homosexual panic despite living in a world free of homophobia. Irene even tells him it would not be the end of the world if John were to admit he has feelings for Sherlock. She herself can do so, despite claiming she is gay, so John, a man who says he is not gay, should be able to do the same.

However, two points speak against such an easy way out. Firstly, Irene is a woman. A woman being in love with a man is the dominant ideology in our society. To admit that she has feelings for Sherlock does not cause a scandal. The worst thing which could happen is critics remarking that her portrayal is sexist or bi-phobic (which has happened, as the next part of this chapter shows). In contrast, if John were to say he has feelings for his friend, the audience's reaction would be different and maybe less welcoming. Irene's claim to be romantically and/or sexually attracted to Sherlock is also problematic, especially in connection to John saying he is not gay, as the next part of this chapter explains.

5.3 Family and Women

In the original stories, Irene Adler appears in "A Scandal in Bohemia". In this story, she tricks Holmes, refusing to play by his rules. In *Sherlock*, however, Sherlock not only destroys her, but also rescues her in the end, robbing her of any agency she might have had in the original stories. She is just another female character who has to be saved by the male lead.

"Sherlock [sic] presents Irene as a lesbian dominatrix with a habit of blackmailing her powerful clients" (Baker 51). In the original stories Irene is not a lesbian and she is not a dominatrix, but an opera singer and an adventuress, and she does not blackmail anyone, except the king of Bohemia, with whom she had an affair. It also becomes clear in the course of the story that Holmes sees her as superior to the king. Moreover, "Irene is also a love interest to [Sherlock], despite both her claimed homosexuality in

the show and her lack of any romantic interest whatsoever in canon” (Baker 51). It is not unusual for adaptations to portray Holmes and Irene Adler as being a couple. The same is done in Guy Ritchie’s films *Sherlock Holmes* and *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*. What makes *Sherlock* problematic is the fact that Irene claims to be gay and then falls in love with Sherlock.

Baker writes about the character of Irene Adler that

Irene is [...] problematic by representing the ideas that sexuality is only fluid when flowing towards heterosexuality and that gay women only need to find the right man – made doubly worse when her queer relationship gets little more than a couple of passing mentions, as it is not as important as her heteronormative relationship with the lead male, who draws her back to the traditional, oppressive gender role of a straight, submissive woman. (54)

Irene Adler is a self-defining gay woman who is then robbed of her gay identity by falling for Sherlock. Moreover, the possibility of bisexuality is erased because she claims to be gay, but then offers to have sex with Sherlock. It is never mentioned that she could be bisexual.

Sexuality in *Sherlock*, in this case, is portrayed to be fluid, but only if it flows from gay to straight. This is a pattern which can be observed over and over again. Queer characters are presented, but the possibility of Sherlock and John being queer is only teased, never made explicit. Sexuality is even presented as fluid, but only as long as it serves to support a heterosexual narrative. Again, instances from “A Scandal in Belgravia” can be called queerbaiting. A queer possibility for John and Sherlock is mentioned and discussed, but never shown, whereas Irene can say, as a gay woman, that she has feelings for Sherlock and would have sex with him. John, as a man who claims not to be gay, cannot do the same. Baker rightfully concludes that the episode “applauds Sherlock’s ability to turn lesbians while shying away from any legitimate queering of his relationship with John, despite Irene drawing comparisons between her own feelings for Sherlock and John’s feelings for Sherlock” (54).

This is not the only problematic aspect of Irene’s character. It is possible to argue that “A Scandal in Belgravia”, which was aired in 2012, is more sexist than “A Scandal in Bohemia”, a story which was published in 1891. In the story, Holmes has to realise that women can be intelligent, despite his low opinion of them. His plan fails because he does not see Irene Adler as a person who could be on the same level as him, just because she has a different gender. “*Sherlock*, unfortunately, fails to consistently codify Holmes’ sexism as a character flaw; in fact, the narrative often seems to be unaware of it at all” (Baker 52).

Sherlock defeats Irene Adler in the end because she is weak enough to fall in love with him. Baker argues that “the narrative perpetuates the stereotype that women are weak and their emotions are irrational when her feelings for Sherlock cause her destruction” (53). Steven Moffat, who wrote the episode, disagrees with this. In an interview with *The Guardian*, which was also quoted above, he said, “In the original, Irene Adler's victory over Sherlock Holmes was to move house and run away with her husband. That's not a feminist victory”. Baker, however, points out that “Adler's victory [in the original story] lies in being able to live the life she chooses to live, with the man she chooses to marry” (53). In the episode, Irene needs Sherlock to save her from a group of terrorists who want to kill her, but in the story, Irene saves herself by marrying and moving to America. Therefore, “A Scandal in Bohemia” is more of a feminist text than “A Scandal in Belgravia” is.

“A Scandal in Belgravia” is an example for *Sherlock* being sexist. Another example of the show itself being sexist can be found in the treatment of Sally Donovan.

In “The Reichenbach Fall”, Sherlock's feud with Sally Donovan escalates. When Sherlock rescues two children who were abducted by Moriarty, Sally and Anderson suspect Sherlock of being the real kidnapper and convince Lestrade to arrest him. Their suspicions are also part of the reason why Sherlock fakes his own death. He tells John that it is true he is a fraud, just as Sally and Anderson want to make everybody believe.

In this case, neither Sally nor Anderson are portrayed in a favourable light. In “The Empty Hearse”, however, the first episode of Series 3, Anderson is shown to regret his treatment of Sherlock. He starts a fan club and constructs theories about how Sherlock could have survived. His character is redeemed. Sally, on the other hand, is never given the opportunity to apologise to Sherlock. In “The Reichenbach Fall”, Sally thinks she is right in assuming that Sherlock is a criminal, so it is debatable if she even needs to apologise to him. However, the audience does not even learn how she feels about this mistake she has made and is therefore encouraged further not to like her. She only appears in one of the three episodes of Series 3 and it is never discussed if she regrets her actions. Here, again, *Sherlock* proves to be a sexist show by giving a male character the opportunity to right his wrongs while giving a female character less than five minutes of screen time.

An example for *Sherlock*, the character, being sexist can be found when looking closely at Molly Hooper. Molly appears during the Christmas party in “A Scandal in Belgravia” where she is wearing a tight, black dress and more makeup than usual because she wants to seduce Sherlock. Sherlock, however, does not consider the

possibility of her trying to impress him, but instead deduces that she must have a new boyfriend. He lunges into a long explanation of how he came to this conclusion, which he ends with, “and that she’s seeing him tonight is evident from her make-up and what she’s wearing. Obviously trying to compensate for the size of her mouth and breasts ...” (“A Scandal in Belgravia”). The whole speech is insulting and hurtful to Molly. Sherlock attacks her appearance, saying her breasts and her mouth are too small. He also does this in “A Study in Pink” when commenting on her lipstick. This criticism reduces Molly to her body; she is not as pretty as Sherlock thinks women need to be, and he attacks her for this.

When Sherlock has a closer look at the presents Molly brought, he realises the prettiest is for him which brings him to understand that Molly is dressed so prettily to impress him. He apologises for being mean to her by kissing her on the cheek before he is interrupted by one of Irene’s texts. This is the only time, according to Baker (52) that Sherlock’s sexism is shown in a negative light, since all the other characters are shocked by his rude behaviour toward Molly and he is forced to apologise to her.

The only female character who is involved in more emotional scenes which move the plot along is Mrs Hudson. In Chapter 4, it was argued that Mrs Hudson fulfils the role of a mother to Sherlock and John. In “A Scandal in Belgravia”, Sherlock almost kills a man for beating her. After this, Sherlock, John, and Mrs Hudson share an intimate, quiet scene in Mrs Hudson’s kitchen during which Sherlock acknowledges her importance in his life: “Mrs Hudson leave Baker Street? England would fall” (“A Scandal in Belgravia”).

In “The Reichenbach Fall”, it becomes clear that Mrs Hudson is one of the three people Sherlock cares about most. Moriarty tells him to commit suicide, otherwise Mrs Hudson, along with John and Lestrade, will be killed. It is therefore obvious that there is a deep connection between Mrs Hudson and Sherlock if he is willing to risk his life to save her.

However, at a closer look, Mrs Hudson’s portrayal is not as positive as it appears. In “His Last Vow”, it is revealed that she used to be an exotic dancer, which is just another expression for stripper. A young Mrs Hudson is therefore sexualised and reduced to her looks, just as Molly is. Now that Mrs Hudson is an older woman, she cannot be sexualised anymore and is instead forced into the role of a mother who has to be defended by Sherlock. Even in the seemingly positive portrayal of Mrs Hudson, *Sherlock* still manages to be sexist and stereotypical.

All in all, *Sherlock* has many sexist elements, as shown by the discussion of Irene Adler, Molly Hooper, and Sally Donovan. Even Mrs Hudson only has the role of a

mother because she is too old to be sexualised. The next, and final, part of this chapter is a continuation of the discussion of Sherlock and Moriarty's relationship.

5.4 The Hero and the Villain

In Series 1, Moriarty and Sherlock's relationship can be considered a form of courtship. In Series 2, however, Moriarty does not want to play games anymore. Instead, he wants to destroy Sherlock by making everyone believe he is a fraud. This ends in a final confrontation between Sherlock and Moriarty on the roof of St Bart's Hospital during which Moriarty blackmails Sherlock into taking his own life to protect his friends.

As in Series 1, Moriarty's queerness in Series 2 forces Sherlock to recognise his own queerness. First of all, the dialogue between them, especially on Moriarty's side, is sexually charged. When Moriarty tries to convince Sherlock to commit suicide at the end of "The Reichenbach Fall", he tells him, "Go on. For me" and in an effort to persuade Sherlock further, he says, "You've got to admit, [killing yourself is] sexier".

From their first meeting onwards, Moriarty has been flirting with Sherlock. And Sherlock is not afraid of reciprocating. At the beginning of "The Reichenbach Fall", Moriarty is caught and put on trial. Sherlock is called as a witness. During his interrogation, Sherlock describes Moriarty with admiration: "James Moriarty isn't a man at all. He's a spider. A spider at the centre of a web. A criminal web with a thousand threads and he knows precisely how each and every single one of them dances". When he is asked for how long he has known Moriarty, he says, "We met twice, five minutes in total. I pulled a gun. He tried to blow me up. I felt we had a special something" ("The Reichenbach Fall"). Added to this is the fact that Moriarty commits crimes to impress Sherlock and to get Sherlock's attention until he decides Sherlock has become too knowledgeable about his business, so he chooses to kill him. Again, Moriarty can be read as the Robert to Sherlock's George in his effort to be close to Sherlock and to be noticed by him. At the end of "The Hounds of Baskerville", there is a scene in which Moriarty is released from a cell where Mycroft had kept him for interrogation. Every inch of the cell's wall is covered in the word "Sherlock". Moriarty carved it into the cement during his imprisonment, signalling Sherlock is the only person who is on his mind. This means that Moriarty is obsessed with Sherlock.

Secondly, during their final confrontation on the rooftop, Moriarty draws a comparison between himself and Sherlock.

SHERLOCK: Yes, but I'm not my brother, remember? I am you. Prepared to do anything. Prepared to burn. Prepared to do what ordinary people won't do. You want me to shake hands with you in Hell? I shall not disappoint you.

MORIARTY: Nah. You talk big. Nah. You're ordinary. You're ordinary, you're on the side of the angels.

SHERLOCK: Oh, I may be on the side of the angels, but don't think for one second that I am one of them.

MORIARTY: No. You're not. I see. You're not ordinary. No. You're me. ("The Reichenbach Fall")

Sherlock and Moriarty are both exceptionally intelligent and they are both bored with ordinary life and on the lookout for a distraction. "The Reichenbach Fall" in general puts emphasis on the similarities between Sherlock and Moriarty. When Moriarty kidnaps two children and Sherlock solves the case, Sally's suspicions toward him are first aroused. Later, the police are interrogating the girl who was kidnapped, and when Sherlock enters the room to talk to her, she starts screaming, confirming Sally's doubts about Sherlock. It is unarguable that there is a connection between Sherlock and Moriarty, that Moriarty is well-aware of this connection, and that he is using it to discredit Sherlock. Therefore, Sherlock can, again, be read as Robert and Moriarty as Gil-Martin. They are similar in character and, apparently, appearance, and Sherlock is drawn to Moriarty the same way Moriarty is drawn to him. He enjoys the games Moriarty is playing with him because it gives him something to do and distracts his mind.

Finally, this raises the question if Sherlock had turned into Moriarty had he not met John. Through John, Sherlock learns what it means to be human, and it is John he is protecting when he is faking his death at the end of "The Reichenbach Fall". In blackmailing Sherlock, Moriarty tells him, "Your friends will die if you don't [jump]." The first friend who comes to Sherlock's mind is John and only when Moriarty says he does not only mean John, Sherlock thinks of Mrs Hudson and Lestrade. John is also the last person Sherlock talks to before he "dies". When he is saying goodbye to John, Sherlock is shown crying, despite John being too far away to see his tears which means he is not doing it as part of an act, suggesting that Sherlock is upset about the prospect of making John think he is dead because he considers John to be his friend and does not want to see him suffer, but this is the only way to get out of this situation. Sherlock sacrifices his career and the life he has built for himself in order to save John, triggered through Moriarty's obsession with Sherlock. This obsession even goes so far that Moriarty shoots himself on the rooftop, so Sherlock cannot use him as a hostage to call off the gunmen who are threatening his friends.

In Series 1, Moriarty's actions lead Sherlock to realise that John is an important part of his life and that he is afraid of losing him. In Series 2, the continuation of Moriarty's obsession with Sherlock leads to Sherlock sacrificing everything so John can be safe. The price Sherlock has to pay for John's life is not only his own life. He also knows

that John has to live with the burden of seeing his friend commit suicide and not being able to stop him. This issue is further addressed in the first episode of Series 3, “The Empty Hearse”, in which John struggles to forgive Sherlock for making him believe he was dead and for leaving him for two years.

To summarise the analysis of Series 2, two aspects are discussed: television codes and sexual orientation.

The scene from “The Hounds of Baskerville” opens up *Sherlock* to a queer possibility more than any other scene before. Appearance, lighting, and how queerness is presented all speak in favour of a queering of Sherlock and John. In presenting Gary and Billy not as stereotypes but as well-rounded characters, the show points out that queer people are simply ordinary people. Gary and Billy are not presented as caricatures, like the queer characters in Series 1. This also supports the reading of John and Sherlock, who are both not stereotypical gay men, as queer. The lighting in the scene is friendly, signalling that there is nothing hostile or freakish about a space which is inhabited by queer people. Queerness is also presented in a positive way by showing Billy and Gary to be ordinary people. There is also no homophobia in *Sherlock*, which also speaks in favour of making a queer relationship between Sherlock and John possible. However, the dialogue in this first scene is not as open to a queer reading as the other three codes. Queer people are shown to be nice, but a queering of Sherlock and John is only teased. Nevertheless, more factors are presented in favour of one.

The scene from “A Scandal in Belgravia” is more difficult to read in such a positive light, especially in connection to Irene Adler. Analysing behaviour, camera, and dialogue, it is possible to argue for a queer reading of John Watson. He is angry with Irene Adler for hurting Sherlock and also jealous because she texts him frequently. John’s emotions are also the focus of this scene, and the camera makes it explicit that Irene and John are attracted to Sherlock in the same way by using the same shots for the both of them when they are talking about their feelings for Sherlock. The dialogue reveals further than John is jealous of Irene, maybe because he sees his homosocial bond with Sherlock threatened or maybe because he has feelings for Sherlock, but thinks that Sherlock is choosing Irene over him.

When it comes to the topic of sexual orientation, it is more difficult to argue in favour of a queer reading. John, for the first time, reveals his sexual orientation partly by saying he is not gay. This does not mean he cannot be read as bisexual. Irene also points out that sexual orientation can be fluid when she, a gay woman, falls in love

with Sherlock. However, sexuality is only portrayed as fluid when a gay woman falls in love with a man. A man who says he is not gay cannot do the same.

Irene Adler is a woman, and women are generally not portrayed favourably by the narrative. This could be the reason why her queer identity is erased by the narrative. Even women who appear to be shown in a positive light, like Mrs Hudson, are only treated with respect because they are too old to be sexualised.

John's sexual orientation is not as open to interpretation as it is in Series 1. After all, he reveals he is not gay. "Not gay" does not equal "heterosexual", however, and it is impossible to ignore the fact that John is attracted to Sherlock in some way. All his heterosexual relationships fail due to the fact that he puts Sherlock's needs before the needs of his girlfriends. Sherlock's sexuality is still open to any interpretation and can be read as queer. He is fascinated by Irene Adler, but does not want to have sex with her. He does not react to her various offers. Through Moriarty, his queerness is foregrounded again, similar to the Series 1. The only difference this time is that Sherlock has to sacrifice himself to save John's life; Moriarty's queerness pushes Sherlock a step farther than it does in Series 1.

It is still possible to argue that Sherlock and John could become a couple in one of the upcoming series. In Series 2, *Sherlock* portrays queer people in a positive light and establishes a world free of homophobia even further. Not explicitly making them a couple could even be considered queerbaiting. *Sherlock* often teases a queer possibility by introducing minor queer characters and by pointing to the fact that John and Sherlock could be a couple without making it explicit. Should this be done only to gain a queer audience and keeping their relationship platonic, it is queerbaiting.

The sixth and final chapter will show how Series 3 includes covert references to a queer possibility in the narrative, and, by doing so, almost erases characters pointing out that John and Sherlock could be a couple. Moreover, reading John as bisexual becomes more plausible by introducing a character who can be read as his ex-boyfriend. There is a shift from *Sherlock* following the rules of male television to following the rules of female television with the introduction of a fan club whose purpose it is to give fans a platform to discuss Sherlock's death, as well as through the introduction of female characters who are portrayed in a favourable light, and the use of occurrences, such as weddings and pregnancies, to make the story more interesting.

6 Series 3

The sixth and final chapter contains an analysis of Series 3. During the final three episodes, the relationship between Sherlock and John changes so drastically, it is almost impossible to use the same criteria as before to analyse the show.

The first part of the chapter is, again, concerned with relationships. In Series 3, there are no queer relationships shown on screen, but most of the straight relationships still do not function well. A discussion of the relationship between Sherlock and John is done through the analysis of the final scene from “His Last Vow”. It is argued that the conversation they have can be read as a love confession on Sherlock’s part. The second part of the chapter is concerned with homosexual panic, which is almost completely absent from Series 3. To show this, a scene from “The Sign of Three” is analysed.

The third part of the chapter discusses women and family, specifically Mary Morstan, John’s fiancée and later wife, and Janine, who is the PA of the main villain and who has a relationship with Sherlock. In the final two parts, it is also discussed why Series 3 follows the conventions of female television, as opposed to the first two series which mostly can be ascribed to male television. Finally, the last part of this chapter will finish the discussion of the relationship between Sherlock and Moriarty and introduce the new villain, Charles Augustus Magnussen.

6.1 Relationships

At the beginning of Series 3, John still mourns for Sherlock, despite Sherlock being dead for two years now and John having fallen in love with Mary Morstan. He still visits Sherlock’s grave and cannot bear to watch a video of Sherlock without having to drink heavy alcohol (“Many Happy Returns”). When John learns that Sherlock is not dead, he cannot bring himself to forgive him for faking his death at first. John thinks they are on the verge of death when he finally tells Sherlock he has forgiven him.

From then on, their relationship is more intimate than ever. In “The Sign of Three”, John tells Sherlock he is his best friend, and that he is one of the two people John “[loves] and [cares] about most in the world” (“The Sign of Three”). Sherlock and John even share a hug at John’s wedding. The homosexual panic has vanished entirely, as discussed below.

At the beginning of “His Last Vow”, Sherlock and John have not met in a month; Sherlock is taking drugs, something which he used to do before the events in “A Study in Pink”, and John is a violent man who would do anything for the thrill of adventure. It is debatable if Sherlock takes drugs because he misses John or because of a case,

but since the topic is not an issue as soon as Sherlock and John are back together, an argument can be made in favour of the former. They cannot bare to be apart for such a long time; they are dependent on the company of the other, in what can be called an unhealthy co-dependency. During the episode, Sherlock is shot by Mary, but makes John (and the audience) believe that Mary did this to save his life, so John will stay with her and be happy. Sherlock's obsession with John's happiness leads him to commit murder in the end when he shoots Magnussen, who has information on Mary for which she would go to prison.

As punishment for killing Magnussen, Sherlock is forced by Mycroft to go on a secret mission to Eastern Europe during which he will certainly die. Sherlock accepts this mission knowing he will not return. To show how the relationship between Sherlock and John has developed, the final scene between them is analysed below, using Fiske, paying attention to behaviour, editing, dialogue, and (heterosexual) romance.

At the beginning of the scene, Mycroft, Sherlock, John, and Mary meet at an airfield from which Sherlock is supposed to travel to Eastern Europe. Sherlock knows this is the last time he will ever see John, so he asks Mycroft for a private moment with him. John is not aware of the gravity of the situation because he thinks Sherlock will return to London after six months have passed. Neither Sherlock nor John are good at talking about their feelings, as John admits when he says in "The Empty Hearse", "I find it difficult, this sort of stuff". Sherlock struggles too; after all, he is the one who hides behind the pretence of being a sociopath.

They stand there, looking at each other, not sure what to say. John is the one who tries to start the conversation, even though it was Sherlock who asked for it. Sherlock proceeds to tell John his whole name to suggest a name for John and Mary's child, but John tells him they are fairly sure it is a girl. Sherlock looks visibly upset, he is biting his lips and staring at the ground, while John looks around, unsure of what to say next. They both admit they do not know what to say. After a brief conversation about a story Mycroft used to tell Sherlock as a child, John asks Sherlock what will happen after the six months. Sherlock, who already knows he will die, looks even more upset than before, not only biting his lips but also blinking fast as if he is trying not to cry. He even tells John, who still cannot stand still, looks around and makes various different grimaces, that it is unlikely he will see him again. But then Sherlock looks serious and says he has to tell John something important, something he had always wanted to say, which turns out to be "Sherlock is actually a girl's name" ("His Last Vow"). This makes John laugh and Sherlock smiles too, before they shake hands and Sherlock gets onto the plane.

Analysing their behaviour in this scene, it can be observed that they are both uncomfortable, but they both show it differently. John is unable to stand still and Sherlock is staring at the ground for most of the scene. John's nervousness can be explained by arguing that he is not good at talking about his feelings and he does not know how to say goodbye to Sherlock, his best friend, because this is an emotional task. Sherlock, who knows about the gravity of his situation, is on the verge of tears because he knows he is going to die and this is the last time he will see John. Sherlock is showing negative feelings in front of another person, which is untypical for him. Before he says, "Sherlock is actually a girl's name," he looks nervous. This nervousness can be explained by arguing that he wants to tell John he has feelings for him, since he only displays nervousness shortly before he makes this joke. It can be read as a joke because it makes both of them laugh, so it is funny to the characters at least.

The editing used in this scene emphasises how uncomfortable and unhappy John and Sherlock are. The scene is cut fast-paced. It lasts a little bit over two minutes and there are 43 cuts, which means around one cut every three seconds. However, a great variety of shots last around one second and there are three which are over ten seconds in length. All three are of Sherlock and John standing face to face, John on the left side of the frame and Sherlock on the right. Fiske says that the "average shot length [in television is] 7 seconds" (8). This does not hold true here because it is shot much faster than this, but also takes time to frame Sherlock and John for longer than ten seconds. The editing is fast, but, in contrast, it also takes time to emphasise the relationship between Sherlock and John one last time by framing them together and making the shots last for over ten seconds.

This means that the emphasis is on both characters and how they act together. However, it is also done to make the audience nervous. To look at someone for such a long time is uncomfortable. Therefore, it is possible to argue that this is an uncomfortable situation. It should be sad, not uncomfortable, because Sherlock sees John for the last time before flying off to his certain death. Instead, both the characters and the audience are nervous, which, again, is in favour of the argument that Sherlock is about to say something which will change his relationship with John forever.

The conversation between Sherlock and John is the most emotional analysed so far because Sherlock starts it in the knowledge that this is the last time he will talk to John, a realisation which also dawns on John as their dialogue progresses.

JOHN: So here we are.

SHERLOCK: William Sherlock Scott Holmes.

JOHN: Sorry?

SHERLOCK: That's the whole of it. If you're looking for baby names.

JOHN: No, we've had a scan. We're pretty sure it's a girl.

SHERLOCK: Oh ... Okay.

JOHN: Yeah ... You know, I can't think of a single thing to say.

SHERLOCK: No, neither can I.

[...]

JOHN: So what about you, then? Where are you actually going now?

SHERLOCK: Oh, some undercover work in Eastern Europe.

JOHN: For how long?

SHERLOCK: Six months, my brother estimates. He's never wrong.

JOHN: And then what?

SHERLOCK: Who knows? John, there's something ... I should say, I've meant to say always and I never have. Since it's unlikely we'll ever meet again, I might as well say it now. Sherlock is actually a girl's name.

JOHN: It's not.

SHERLOCK: It was worth a try.

JOHN: We're not naming our daughter after you.

SHERLOCK: I think it could work. To the very best of times, John. ("His Last Vow")

At first, the scene can still be read as one friend trying to convince the other half-jokingly to name their child after them. The scene takes a turn, however, when Sherlock says there is something he has always wanted to say and because "it's unlikely we'll ever meet again, I might as well say it now" ("His Last Vow"). It is impossible to say for certain what Sherlock wants to say, but it sounds as if he is about to make a love confession, considering he then makes a long pause and breathes in deeply. He is certainly not just trying to tell John how much he values their friendship and what an important part of his life John is because he already does this while giving his best man's speech at John's wedding in "The Sign of Three". "Sherlock is actually a girl's name" seems like a last minute excuse not to confess his feelings for John, especially since he starts the sentence with "John, there's something ... I should say, I've meant to say always and then never have" ("His Last Vow"). It is highly unlikely that he always wanted to tell John that he has a girl's name, especially since the topic of Sherlock's name never arises in all nine episodes. Also, Sherlock has just learned that John and Mary are expecting a daughter, so it can be argued that it is not something he has wanted to tell him for a long time. Sherlock assumes he is going to die in Eastern Europe and he is never going to see John again, so he wants to use this last opportunity to tell him he loves him romantically, but then does not go through

with his plan because he, just like John, finds it difficult to talk about his feelings. So he makes a joke, shakes John's hand, and leaves.

"Sherlock is actually a girl's name" gets a different connotation when looking back at "A Study in Pink". In this episode, John points out that "Harry's short for Harriet" when Sherlock assumes that John has a brother, solely based on the name and the fact that the person is married to a woman. John tells Sherlock that someone he thought is a man is actually a queer woman, thereby challenging Sherlock's heteronormative worldview. "Sherlock is actually a girl's name" can therefore be read as Sherlock telling John he is in love with him, despite them being both men, therefore, again, challenging a heteronormative worldview. Consequently, the joke can also be read as a love confession on Sherlock's part.

The scene is reminiscent of another famous scene which takes place at an airport: the tarmac scene from *Casablanca*. During this scene, Rick Blaine sends the love of his life, Ilsa Lund, away. There are two plane tickets and instead of saving himself, he sacrifices his safety to save Ilsa and her husband Victor Laszlo. Something similar happens in "His Last Vow", only that the roles are reversed. Instead of sending John and Mary away to save them, Sherlock first commits a murder and then willingly goes to his death so they can be saved.

In *Casablanca*, Rick and Ilsa fall in love, but then they are separated, only to meet again years later. Ilsa is married, but they both realise they still have feelings for each other. Rick loves Ilsa so much that he is willing to sacrifice his own life in order to save her and Laszlo, even though it would mean never to see Ilsa again. In a broader sense, the stories of *Casablanca* and *Sherlock* are similar. During Series 1 and 2, Sherlock and John become close friends and colleagues and, as discussed in Chapter 4 and 5, might even develop feelings for each other. Then they are separated, only to meet again years later. John is as good as engaged and goes through with his marriage, but they both realise they cannot be without each other. Sherlock is so obsessed with John's happiness that he is willing to sacrifice his own life in order to save him and Mary, even though it would mean never to see John again.

The scenes from "His Last Vow" and from *Casablanca* are similar on the surface because both take place at an airfield and both contain a character sacrificing himself so another character can live. It is important to ask how the scene in "His Last Vow" would be read if either Sherlock or John were a woman. If John were a woman, the scene would be almost identical to the scene in *Casablanca* and it would therefore be impossible to deny a romantic connotation. Since John is a man, however, it is also possible to argue that Sherlock is sacrificing himself to save his best homosocial friend.

It is feasible to compare *Casablanca* and *Sherlock*, especially considering other events in “His Last Vow”. The whole episode shows how much Sherlock cares about John and what he is willing to do in order for John to be safe.

Another example for this can be found when Sherlock and John break into Magnussen’s office to retrieve letters for a client. Sherlock surprises Mary who is about to shoot Magnussen. Instead, Mary shoots Sherlock, even though Sherlock offers to help her, and lets Magnussen live. Later, Sherlock explains that Mary wanted to protect him from being blamed for Magnussen’s murder and therefore makes it sound as if Mary saved his life, when, in fact, she tried to kill him.

Sherlock being shot leads to a long sequence of him dying. This sequence takes place in his mind palace, a place where he stores useful information, which consists of places from his and John’s first case. In his mind palace, Sherlock meets Mary who is wearing a wedding dress and shoots him in the heart. This can be read as her wedding to John being as painful for Sherlock as being shot by her because of his love for John, which is symbolised by Mary shooting him in the heart.

When Sherlock reaches the final room, a cell in which Moriarty is chained to the wall, he is about to give up fighting for his life. This has the effect of his heart stopping. Moriarty is taunting him all the time and when Sherlock is dead, he says, “You’re letting him down, Sherlock. John Watson is definitely in danger” (“His Last Vow”). The will to save John gives Sherlock enough strength to restart his heart and fight his way back up the stairs from the house in “A Study in Pink” where Sherlock and John went to investigate their first murder together.

The mind palace scene reveals two things: John’s wedding hurt Sherlock immeasurably and Sherlock cares so much for John that he manages to restart his own heart. Sherlock, a self-diagnosed sociopath, who uses this description to fend off advances from people around him, cares so much for John that he restarts his heart, kills another man, and is willing to die as long as it means that John is safe. It is therefore undeniable that Sherlock loves John. Instead of having other characters ask the question if Sherlock and John are a couple, Series 3 offers different approaches to introduce a queer possibility. The mind palace as well as the tarmac scene discussed above can be read as Sherlock being in love with John.

A queer possibility is raised explicitly six times, three times by other characters, and three times by Sherlock and John themselves. The tarmac scene is read as one such instance, two are more explicit and are both discussed below. The three times other characters allude to Sherlock and John being a couple is almost trivial when compared to the seven times in Series 1 and the ten times in Series 2. Instead, the imagery and

the symbolism as well as the relationship between Sherlock and John has become more open to a queer possibility than in the two previous series. There are no more allusions by other characters, but John and Sherlock themselves point to the fact that their relationship can be read as queer.

However, there are no queer characters in Series 3. Harry, John's sister, is again only mentioned, and Irene Adler appears for a few brief seconds in Sherlock's mind palace in "The Sign of Three", but when compared to Series 1 and 2, Series 3 is the one with the least queer characters. Still, from the eight heterosexual relationships shown or mentioned, only two are functional. Mrs Hudson and Mr Chatterjee do not look happy when they are shown together at John's wedding in "The Sign of Three", Molly, who is engaged in the first two episodes, is single again in "His Last Vow", the husband of one of Sherlock's clients commits suicide, and Sherlock himself enters into a fake relationship only to gain access to Magnussen's office.

Even the relationship between John and Mary is doomed to fail. "The Sign of Three" contains about an hour of footage of giving praise to the friendship between Sherlock and John, showing them solving cases and letting Sherlock give a speech which comes close to a love confession, while completely ignoring the actual wedding and not allowing even a glimpse of John and Mary exchanging vows. Moreover, Mary kills Sherlock (he is clinically dead before restarting his own heart) and it is impossible to say if John forgives her without having seen the next series. He is shown forgiving her on screen, but since several months, which are not shown, pass between Mary shooting Sherlock and John forgiving her, it could also be the case that John forgiving her is part of a plan Sherlock and John agreed on to unmask Mary as a villain. It is also interesting to ask if John wants to forgive her since it is questionable if he is really happy as a married man. After all, he dreams of his adventures with Sherlock at the beginning of "His Last Vow", and he tries to regain some of the excitement by forcing his way into a drug den and beating up an addict. In other words, John's heterosexual relationship to Mary functions as a plot device to advance the relationship between Sherlock and John. It is undeniable that John in Series 3 is much more relaxed when faced with the question if he and Sherlock are a couple. His homosexual panic is almost entirely gone, as discussed in the next part of this chapter.

6.2 Homosexual Panic

As was mentioned above, Series 3 points to a queer possibility frequently through the interaction of John and Sherlock. In fact, John denies being gay only once, at the beginning of "The Empty Hearse". He visits Mrs Hudson, wanting to tell her that he is about to ask someone to marry him. Mrs Hudson is surprised by this news: "So soon

after Sherlock?” She asks for the man’s name and is surprised when John tells her he is getting married to a woman. She says, “You really have moved on, haven’t you?” to which John replies, “Mrs Hudson, how many times? Sherlock was not my boyfriend. [...] Listen to me. I am not gay!” (“The Empty Hearse”).

This is the only time in Series 3 that John is aggressive when the possibility of him and Sherlock being a couple is mentioned. Interestingly, he himself brings up the topic twice, once as part of a joke; the second time, however, he is completely serious. This scene is discussed in length below.

John does not seem to suffer from homosexual panic as much as he used to because he is in a stable relationship with a woman whom he marries. This makes it more difficult for people to assume he is in a relationship with Sherlock. This might also be the reason why the topic is not mentioned explicitly by other characters as frequently as it used to be. Yet, John makes jokes about him and Sherlock being a couple, for example at the end of “The Sign of Three”. During the wedding party, Sherlock tells Mary she should not be afraid of dancing with John because, “I have been tutoring him”, to which John agrees, saying, “He did, you know. Baker Street, behind closed curtains. Mrs Hudson came in one time. Don’t know how those rumours started”. From this short exchange, the audience learns that Sherlock taught John how to dance and that John is not afraid of raising a queer possibility anymore when other people are present. Nevertheless, he still does it through something which can be read as a joke to him because he starts to laugh. After his wedding he is in a safe place to draw attention to the fact that there are rumours about him and Sherlock being a couple. Of course, Mrs Hudson did not need to walk in on them dancing to suspect something because, in “A Study in Pink”, she immediately assumes Sherlock and John are a couple when Sherlock shows John the flat.

There is another scene in “The Sign of Three” during which it becomes obvious that John is much more open to the prospect of entering into a sexual and/or romantic relationship with Sherlock than in Series 1 and 2. The scene takes place during John’s stag night. He and Sherlock are playing *Who Am I?*, a game for which each player has to choose a famous person for another player to guess. During this scene, both Sherlock and John are drunk and therefore completely relaxed and at ease, letting their guard down. The scene is analysed using body language, camera, character, and sexuality.

Both Sherlock’s and John’s body language is relaxed and open. They are sitting in their armchairs in the living room of 221B Baker Street. The scene starts with John leant forward, while Sherlock is leaning back in his chair when John tries to guess

whose name Sherlock put on the piece of paper on his head. When it is Sherlock's turn, Sherlock leans forward and John leans back until he is almost lying in his chair, both arms and legs spread wide. They change postures again once it is John's turn. However, John slowly glides from his chair until his knees are almost touching the floor, so he uses his left hand to steady himself on Sherlock's knee and to push himself back up. This is followed by him shrugging and looking around, declaring, "I don't mind" ("The Sign of Three"). From then on, they are both leaning forward while they are discussing the concept of beauty. John, despite having pushed himself back into his chair, is almost kneeling between Sherlock's legs which are spread wide. When John lies back again, Sherlock crosses his legs and John is using the space which becomes available through this to put up his feet on Sherlock's chair. Then their game is interrupted by Mrs Hudson bringing a client to them.

In analysing the body language, it can be argued that their interaction teases a queer possibility, not what other characters are saying. They are more relaxed and closer to each other than they have ever been in all three series. John and Sherlock are hardly ever shown displaying physical contact, and here John touches Sherlock's knee, an action which has a sexual connotation, at least in John's eyes; otherwise he would not point out that he does not mind touching Sherlock's knee.

As mentioned above, in this scene, Sherlock and John are drunk, which allows them to let their guard down and become more relaxed than they have ever been in the company of one another. This can be seen by analysing their body language. The camera movements and shots further support this argumentation.

The shot sizes in this scene are either full shots or close ups and medium close-ups. It starts with a close up of Sherlock, followed by a close up of John. Then a full shot is used which shows both Sherlock and John, John on the left, Sherlock on the right, similar to the last scene in "His Last Vow" discussed above. Also, the full shots are much longer than any other shots, again, like in the scene from "His Last Vow", analysed above. After the full shot, there are two medium close-ups of Sherlock and two of John, before a medium long shot of Sherlock, filmed from next to John's chair leads to another full shot during which John uses Sherlock's knee to steady himself. This is followed by, again, two medium close-ups of John and two of Sherlock, before another, shorter, full shot of them both leads to a close up of first Sherlock and then John. Finally, another medium long shot of Sherlock allows the audience to see how John is putting up his feet on Sherlock's chair before the scene finishes with another full shot of John and Sherlock.

During this scene, both Sherlock and John appear in the shot together or the camera is so close that the audience can see every detail of their facial expressions. As was mentioned in Chapter 4, close ups are used to create “an intimate, comfortable relationship with the characters on the screen” (Fiske 6). So not only does the body language of the characters suggest openness and comfort, the camera also contributes to this impression by mostly using medium close-ups and close ups.

The camera suggests that this is an intimate scene. The audience is allowed to see their faces close up, which creates intimacy because if the audience were having an intimate conversation with the characters, they would be this close to them. Also, by shooting the scene in this way, Sherlock and John appear to be closer together than they actually are, which, again, creates intimacy.

Also, leading up to this scene, a character development can be observed, especially for John. In Series 1, he frequently aggressively denies that he and Sherlock are a couple and is worried about what people will say if they see them together. In Series 2, he denies being gay, but also has to admit that he and Sherlock are a couple of some sort and that he would rather spend time with Sherlock than with his girlfriends. At the beginning of Series 3, he declares proudly that he has finally moved on from losing Sherlock with the help of his future wife Mary. Mary and Sherlock are of similar importance in John’s life, and in “The Sign of Three”, John frequently comments on this. He tells Sherlock, “The thing about Mary, she has completely turned my life around. Changed everything. But for the record, over the last few years, there are two people who have done that” (“The Sign of Three”). The other one is Sherlock, whom John meets when he is going through a difficult time in his life, but who gives John a purpose again. With Mary, it is the same. When John meets Sherlock, he has lost his employment and his purpose and is struggling to find his way back to a normal, civilian life. Sherlock takes him along to solve crimes and involves him in a dangerous profession. When John meets Mary, he has lost his best friend and his purpose and is struggling to find his way back to a normal, civilian life. Mary gives him the comfort and safety he has tried to gain by dating a string of women when Sherlock was still alive. However, as soon as Sherlock returns from the dead, John prefers the life Sherlock has to offer him. Without forgiving him, John gladly assists Sherlock with a case, preferring Sherlock’s company over his fiancée’s.

Another instance where John compares Sherlock to Mary is when he asks him to be his best man. “I want to be up there with the two people that I love and care about most in the world. [...] Mary Morstan [...] ... and ... you” (“The Sign of Three”). After his engagement, John is not afraid of expressing the feelings he has for Sherlock,

homosocial or other. He is safe in the knowledge that he is engaged to a woman, so nobody has any reason to believe that he and Sherlock are a couple. He therefore expresses his affection for Sherlock frequently, putting him on the same level as his wife. This means he is much more comfortable with his feelings for Sherlock, he does not have to hide them in front of the world as in the two previous series. Even though he marries, he can be read as queerer than ever.

In this scene, John, for the first time in three series, says out loud that he does not mind, in a broader sense, when people assume he and Sherlock are a couple. Admittedly, he is drunk and the only person who hears him say this is Sherlock, but it is nevertheless a step away from the writers teasing at a queer possibility and a step toward opening the door for one. Until this point, John's sexual orientation could have been read as bisexual, but he was more obviously heterosexual than anything else. In this scene now, it is just him and Sherlock, and John finds himself in a secure place where others cannot judge him anymore for spending time with Sherlock because he is engaged to a woman. The homosocial bond between Sherlock and John is strengthened through this engagement because it gives John the upper hand in a discussion about the nature of his bond with Sherlock. It might also be helpful to him that he does not live with Sherlock anymore, but shares a flat with his fiancée.

So when John touches Sherlock's knee and declares that he does not mind, the question of what he does not mind in particular needs to be raised. Does he not mind touching Sherlock's knee or does he not mind the possible implications of his actions, namely that people would assume they are a couple if they saw him doing this? It is possible he does not mind either. He certainly does not mind people assuming he and Sherlock are a couple because he can prove that they are not by telling everyone that he is engaged to a woman. He is now in a safe position to touch Sherlock's knee if he wants to and if anyone makes a remark about it, he can say, "No, but I'm married to a woman". However, he and Sherlock are the only people present in this scene, so he also says it for Sherlock's benefit. John might try to say that, from now on, he does not care whether people assume they are dating, so he will not argue so aggressively whenever the topic is mentioned. But he could also be trying to say that he does not mind touching Sherlock's knee, that he would not mind doing it again. After all, he does it out of his own free will. It can therefore be argued that John is much more open to a queer possibility. Sherlock, as was established in the two previous chapters, has always been open to such a possibility.

The scene discussed above shows that, even though John is married to a woman by the end of "His Last Vow", there is still room for a queer reading. In fact, the possibility

is even more prevalent than in Series 1 and 2. It is not so much third parties who raise an awareness for a queer relationship between Sherlock and John, it is the narrative itself. To show how this is done, the topic of women and family needs to be discussed in detail once again.

6.3 Family and Women

Similar to frequently implicitly implying a queering of Sherlock and John, Series 3 also has more female characters of importance than any other series. First of all, there is Janine who is introduced in “The Sign of Three” as Mary’s bridesmaid. Throughout this episode, she openly flirts with Sherlock who seems to be taken aback by her advances. She also recognises that Sherlock is not interested in a romantic and/or sexual relationship with a woman. At the end of the episode, she remarks “I wish you weren’t ... whatever it is you are”, to which Sherlock replies, “I know” (“The Sign of Three”). It is undeniable that Sherlock and Janine understand each other, which makes her, next to Mary and Mrs Hudson, the only woman whom Sherlock treats nicely. In Janine, Sherlock has found someone who recognises he is different and does not judge him for this. At first, it seems as if Janine enjoys Sherlock’s company purely because he can deduce whether a man is a suitable sex partner for her or not. At the end of the episode, however, their relationship has developed to be based on mutual understanding.

At the beginning of “His Last Vow”, it is revealed that Sherlock and Janine are dating. “His Last Vow” is partly based on the story “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton”, during which Holmes proposes to a maid working for Milverton to gain access to his house. This also happens in the episode, where Sherlock enters into a romantic relationship with Janine, Magnussen’s P.A. Sherlock also proposes to her to gain access to Magnussen’s office. Later, Janine learns that Sherlock is not in love with her, but only used her to get to Magnussen. During their final conversation, it is revealed that they never had sex, which Janine laments even after she learns Sherlock was just using her. She tells him “[j]ust once would have been nice”, but Sherlock claims he had wanted to wait until after they were married (“His Last Vow”).

There are two different readings for why Sherlock does not want to sleep with Janine. On the one hand, he does not want to use her for sex if he knows he does not have feelings for her. However, two factors speak against this reading. Firstly, Janine does not mind just having sex with men, as is established in “The Sign of Three”. And secondly, Sherlock does not have reservations about using people to get what he wants, for example Molly, so if he had wanted to sleep with Janine, he would have done so. On the other hand, Sherlock is not interested in having sex (with women). He

rejects Irene's advances in "A Scandal in Belgravia" and he even refuses to have sex when he officially is in a relationship. There are two instances of Sherlock rejecting sexual advances from women and it is therefore possible to argue that he does not want to have sex with women in general. It is impossible to say if he would also reject a man. In "The Great Game", Sherlock is offered sex by a man (Moriarty), which is a joke to Sherlock because he is focused on making fun of Molly for being in a relationship with a gay man. Sherlock has never received an earnest offer, so it is difficult to say how he would react. Considering the evidence, it is highly plausible that Sherlock does not want to have sex with women and it is not revealed how he would react to having sex with a man. Even when he is in a relationship with a woman, he is still queer.

In "A Scandal in Belgravia", John acts jealous when confronted with the possibility of Sherlock and Irene being in a relationship. As was pointed out in Chapter 5, this could either be because John is scared of losing his homosocial bond to Sherlock or because he wants to be in a romantic and/or sexual relationship with Sherlock himself and sees Irene as a rival. When confronted with Sherlock's relationship in "His Last Vow" for the first time, John does not know that Sherlock is only using Janine. He reacts with disbelief and jealousy, and rather wants to talk about Sherlock being in a relationship than about Sherlock's current case. However, this time, John does not have a reason for being jealous of Janine. First of all, his homosocial bond with Sherlock is already different from how it was in "A Scandal in Belgravia" because they are not living and working together anymore, and because John is married to a woman. He could, however, still be jealous in a romantic sense because Sherlock tells him in "A Study in Pink" that he is not interested in relationships but now has a girlfriend. John also does not know that Sherlock and Janine are not having sex because when he learns about their relationship, Janine emerges from Sherlock's bedroom, dressed only in one of his shirts. John could, therefore, feel jealous because Sherlock rejected him and made him believe he does not want to have a relationship and is now dating Janine. It is likely that John is angry with Sherlock for rejecting him in "A Study in Pink" and can therefore be read as queer as well, especially considering his constant jealousy of every woman who comes close to Sherlock in any way.

Sherlock is never shown to be jealous when he is confronted with Mary. On the contrary, he does everything he can to make John's wedding perfect. Sherlock even cares about John's wedding more than about cases because he uses all his time to plan it. Sherlock is not jealous of Mary; in fact, they appear to be close friends, but he is terrified of losing his homosocial bond with John. He is scared he will be forgotten and this fear is justified. However, when faced with the possibility of John having had

a relationship with another man, he is just as jealous as John is of Irene and Janine. He does not express this jealousy in front of John, but only in front of Mary, who taunts him for it. John invites his ex-commander, James Sholto, to his wedding. During the preparations, Sherlock learns that John and Sholto used to be friends in the army. However, John has never mentioned Sholto to Sherlock, not even his name, and Mary upsets Sherlock when she tells him John talks about Sholto all the time with her. Sherlock is obviously jealous of Sholto.

MARY: I didn't think he'd show up at all. John says he's the most unsociable man he's ever met.

SHERLOCK: He is? He's the most unsociable?

MARY: Mmm.

SHERLOCK: Ah, that's why he's bouncing round him like a puppy.

MARY: Oh, Sherlock. Neither of us were the first, you know. ("The Sign of Three")

Sherlock is jealous of John paying attention to another man. This could be because Sholto threatens the close homosocial bond he has with John. But then Mary says that neither she nor Sherlock were the first. As established above, John sees Sherlock and Mary of equal importance in his life. So Mary could mean that neither Sherlock nor she were the first important people in John's life. However, Mary could also mean that neither she nor Sherlock were the first sexual and/or romantic relationship. After all, Mary met John at a time in his life when he was still mourning Sherlock's death, so she might suspect that their relationship was more than "just" friendship. Sholto also hardly ever leaves his house because people are sending him death threats because of a fatal mistake he has made in the army. Nevertheless, John means so much to him that he is willing to risk his life to come to his wedding. Those are the reasons why Sholto can be read as John's ex-boyfriend and why John can be read as bisexual.

Mary is certainly the most interesting and faceted female character introduced in *Sherlock*. In "The Empty Hearse", she appears as a woman who immediately befriends Sherlock and convinces John to forgive him. In "The Sign of Three", she is included when Sherlock and John try to save Sholto's life. In "His Last Vow", however, she is revealed to be a CIA trained assassin who attempts to kill Magnussen and shoots Sherlock, then threatens Sherlock into not telling John because she does not want to lose him. At this time, it is impossible to say how her character will be developed further and if she turns out to be a villain or if John will forgive her for shooting Sherlock. However, what speaks in favour of her being a villain, is Steven Moffat alluding to it during the audio commentary for "His Last Vow": "Structurally it allows you to get past the fact that Mary has shot Sherlock and been revealed to be a villain and now is going to be forgiven, in a relatively short space of time".

Through the introduction of Mary, *Sherlock* displays more traits of female television than of male. The focus is no longer on solving cases, but on Sherlock working hard to give John and Mary a happy life together. Moreover, John and Mary's wedding is not a happy ending, but the beginning of difficulties, since, after only a month of marriage, John discovers that Mary is not the woman he thought she was. The problem with "His Last Vow" is that there are several months missing from the narrative during which the audience does not know if John moves back in with Sherlock or if he stays with Mary after she shoots Sherlock, of which John is aware. What causes even more problems to the marriage is the fact that Mary is pregnant. John cannot simply divorce her when she kills Sherlock, but also has to think of his unborn child. This is more reminiscent of a soap opera than of a detective show.

Series 3 includes much more family ties than any other series, not only through weddings, but also through letting Sherlock construct a family for himself. Sherlock is the first person to deduce that Mary is pregnant at the end of "The Sign of Three", even before Mary or John know about it. Both panic when Sherlock tells them about the baby, so he points out, "You're already the best parents in the world, look at all the practice you've had. [...] Well, you're hardly going to need me around now that you've got a real baby on the way" ("The Sign of Three"). Similar to Yorick in *A Sentimental Journey*, Sherlock creates a family out of a suitable man and a suitable woman. Sherlock desires to be the son in a family, which is strange because he has a functional family, something which is mostly absent from *Sherlock*.

Interestingly, Series 3 reveals how similar John is to Sherlock's father. Both Sherlock's mother and father appear for the first time in "The Empty Hearse" and are shown to be lovely, caring people. When looking closer at Sherlock's father, it is undeniable that he and John practically dress the same (see Appendix) in a checked shirt and a simple jacket. It can therefore be argued that John reminds Sherlock of his father and he therefore needs to be close to him. Moreover, during the stag night mentioned above, John asks Sherlock if he is pretty to which Sherlock replies, "Beauty is a construct based entirely on childhood impressions, influences and role models" ("The Sign of Three"). Through his childhood impressions, Sherlock might be drawn to John. Sherlock recognises similarities to his father in John and is therefore drawn to him.

So far, John's similarities to Sherlock's father might be a reason for Sherlock's need to be close to John. However, it is also obvious that Sherlock dresses similar to his mother, who wears a long, dark coat with an upturned collar (see Appendix). In "His Last Vow", it is revealed that Sherlock's mother is a brilliant mathematician who gave up her career to raise her children. Sherlock's father remarks, "Complete flake, my

wife, but happens to be a genius" ("His Last Vow"). Sherlock's mother is shown to be more of a genius than his father, just like Sherlock is more intelligent than John.

In Sherlock's parents, a mirror for Sherlock and John can be found. It starts with their dress and ends with their intelligence. It is likely that Sherlock recognises something of his father in John and is therefore drawn to him, but it is also undeniable that Sherlock shares similarities with his mother. Series 3 introduces a functional couple who is similar to John and Sherlock, another implicit attempt to open the door for a queer possibility, which means a romantic and/or sexual relationship between Sherlock and John has the potential to work. So far, Sherlock's parents have one of the few relationships which do not end in death and destruction.

In *Television Culture*, Fiske writes that soap operas are frequently concerned with relationships and that "[t]his concern with relationships often manifests itself in an extreme form in the theme of incest" (182). This theme does not appear in *Sherlock*. Fiske, however, goes on to say that "[t]he commonness of incest as a topic in soap operas, and its absence from more 'masculine' television genres, suggests, at the very least, that women find more pleasure in interrogating the boundaries that it assumes, and thus in interrogating the system that has set them in place" (182). In making Sherlock and John a couple, *Sherlock* would explore a kind of relationship which is still frowned upon by most of society. And it would definitely be ascribed to female rather than to male television because female television explores relationships which do not conform to the norm. Interestingly, as the final part of this chapter shows, Series 3 shows more signs of female television than Series 1 and 2 do.

6.4 The Hero and the Villain

"The Empty Hearse" is not only the name of the first episode, but also the name of a fan club founded by Anderson, where people meet to discuss theories on how Sherlock could have survived his suicide. According to Fiske, gossip is a part of "the oral culture of women" (279). Meeting with fellow enthusiasts and discussing theories or character development is something which is associated with women. *Sherlock*, despite following the conventions of male television, at least in Series 1 and 2, has a large female fanbase. It can even be argued that most of the fans who participate in the fan culture online are women. According to two surveys done for a bachelor thesis on how the third series of *Sherlock* was received on the blogging platform *tumblr.com*, most of the members of the fan community are female. The first survey was completed by 217 female, seven male, and 6 participants who chose not to identify as either. The second survey was completed by 100 female and 1 male participants (Eisenprobst n.p.). Participating in a fan community to exchange theories about a show is something

which is associated with female television. It is therefore possible to argue that *Sherlock* can also be ascribed to female television. The Empty Hearse, despite being founded by a man, also has various female members.

“The Empty Hearse” opens with Anderson telling Lestrade one of his theories about how Sherlock could have survived. His theory contains a kiss between Sherlock and Molly, suggesting that Sherlock is attracted to Molly, which could have been a possible reading after watching “The Reichenbach Fall”. Sherlock and Molly are shown interacting frequently, so it is not surprising that Anderson suspects they are in a relationship.

“The Empty Hearse” also shows another theory, brought forward by a young woman. In this theory, Sherlock and Moriarty are working together to make John believe Sherlock is dead. The scene ends with Sherlock and Moriarty staring into each other’s eyes and leaning closer and closer, but shortly before they kiss, Anderson stops the woman from talking by asking her if she is out of her mind. The woman defends herself, pointing out, “I don’t see why not. It’s just as plausible as some of your theories” (“The Empty Hearse”).

The possibility of Sherlock and Molly being a couple is perfectly acceptable in Anderson’s mind, but the possibility of Sherlock and Moriarty being in a relationship causes him to question the sanity of the woman whose theory it is. As was mentioned in the previous two chapters, critics have written about the erotically charged relationship between Moriarty and Sherlock. The writers of *Sherlock* seem to be aware of the popularity of both the pairing of Sherlock and Moriarty and Sherlock and Molly. On the fanfiction website *archiveofourown.org* there are 71,748 pieces of fanfiction written about *Sherlock*. 3,468 contain the pairing Sherlock and Molly, and 1,165 contain the pairing Sherlock and Moriarty. Those numbers are significant, considering that 36,490 fanfictions are about the pairing Sherlock and John and the next largest number is 3,995 for the pairing Mycroft Holmes and Greg Lestrade.⁹ In writing the episode, Mark Gatiss addressed the fandom by showing two popular pairings, but only showing the heterosexual kiss explicitly, not the queer one. This, again, raises the question why *Sherlock* only teases (queerbait) a queer possibility but shies away from making it explicit.

Series 3 also introduces a villain who is much more dangerous than Moriarty ever was and who pushes Sherlock farther than Moriarty ever did: Charles Augustus Magnussen. As mentioned above, he is based on the blackmailer Charles Augustus

⁹ See: <http://archiveofourown.org/>, accessed: 18 April 2015.

Milverton who appears in the story "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton". Magnussen also blackmails people and Sherlock hates him because "he attacks people who are different and preys on their secrets" ("His Last Vow"). Sherlock takes up a case offered to him by a woman called Lady Smallwood whose husband is being blackmailed by Magnussen. However, he soon discovers that Mary is also in danger because she used to be an assassin, which Magnussen uses to blackmail her. Sherlock, therefore, decides to do everything he can to save Mary (and therefore John) from Magnussen.

At the end of "His Last Vow", Sherlock learns that Magnussen has a mind palace of his own in which he stores all the information he needs to blackmail people. The only way to ensure that Mary and John are safe from him is to kill him, which Sherlock does.

Magnussen is more dangerous than Moriarty because he is not obviously a villain. He can also not be compared to Sherlock to such an extent as Moriarty can. Magnussen is a wealthy, respectable businessman who owns a newspaper agency and who cannot easily be found guilty of a crime because he is simply too powerful. Moriarty threatens John and Sherlock's lives, but he "only" threatens to kill them, as opposed to Magnussen, who could potentially destroy the lives of everyone involved. In the end, his actions force Sherlock to commit murder and therefore pushes him further than Moriarty ever did.

Sherlock's actions at the end of "His Last Vow" also show how far he is willing to go to protect John. Moriarty in Series 1 leads Sherlock to realise how valuable John is to him. In Series 2, he is willing to kill his reputation in order to save John's life. In Series 3, Sherlock has to become the one thing he is fighting in order to ensure that John and Mary can be safe. Killing a man will forever leave a mark on his life.

Moriarty can be read as a queer character, but Magnussen is a character who destroys people who are different. This is the reason why Sherlock hates him, possibly even more than he hates Moriarty. In Moriarty, Sherlock can see a kindred spirit, but he has nothing in common with Magnussen. Magnussen would jump at the opportunity to reveal someone's sexual preferences to hurt them. Moriarty contributes to a queer possibility, Magnussen uses it to hurt people. He uses people's weak spots (which he calls "pressure points") against them, in Sherlock's case his willingness to sacrifice himself for John. Whereas Moriarty contributes to Sherlock realising his feelings (homosocial or other), Magnussen turns them into something negative, something which he can use to get what he wants.

Magnussen is also a character who could be found in a soap opera, someone who collects people's secrets and uses them to get what he wants. He is much more a

character of female television than Moriarty, who commits crimes, such as murder or theft. But most importantly, he pushes Sherlock another step forward in his quest to save John, even if it means ruining his life entirely. Sherlock's punishment for the murder is to go on a mission for Mycroft during which he will almost certainly die. In his obsession with John's happiness, Sherlock is willing to commit a horrible crime and to die as punishment.

Moriarty raises a queer possibility but Magnussen almost makes it explicit. Sherlock hates Magnussen for hurting people who are different (which also includes queer people). The only way to solve the case this time is to kill the antagonist, which Sherlock does, but only when John is in danger. Sherlock sacrifices his life so John can be safe, which means he loves John in one way or another.

To summarise this final analysis, the same two aspects as before are discussed: television codes and sexual orientation.

The scene from "His Last Vow" can be read as Sherlock making a love confession. All four television codes speak for this interpretation. Sherlock is nervous rather than frightened, suggesting he wants to tell John something which would change their relationship forever, when he should be scared because he is sent away to his certain death. Sherlock being nervous before saying "Sherlock is actually a girl's name" can be interpreted as him trying to make a love confession. The editing invokes nervousness in the audience, which mirrors Sherlock's nervousness. As was discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, editing and camera are often used deliberately in *Sherlock* to invoke certain feelings in the audience. Here, the audience is encouraged to feel nervous, just as Sherlock. The dialogue can be read as a love confession. In saying, "Sherlock is actually a girl's name", Sherlock challenges John's heteronormative assumptions. This mirrors John challenging Sherlock's heteronormative assumptions in "A Study in Pink". Sherlock is trying to tell John he is in love with him. Finally, when compared to a similar scene from *Casablanca*, it can be argued that this scene from "His Last Vow" would immediately be read romantically if either Sherlock or John were a woman, therefore supporting a queer reading of this scene.

The scene from "The Sign of Three" can be read as John accepting his sexuality. His body language is relaxed and laden with sexual connotation when he touches Sherlock's knee, which he does not mind. The camera reduces the space between Sherlock and John and also puts the audience into an intimate distance to the characters, suggesting, once more, that this is an intimate conversation, and that this intimacy could go beyond the intimacy shared between two homosocial friends. John's

character development also suggests that he is more open to accepting that he is not entirely heterosexual. He is able to tell Sherlock that he cares for him and, through his engagement, he loses most of his homosexual panic, which makes him more open to a queer possibility. His sexuality, finally, can be read as bisexual more than in any previous series, as evidenced, for example, by him declaring, "I don't mind" ("The Sign of Three") after touching Sherlock's knee.

Sherlock's sexuality is still not revealed. In fact, it is never talked about in Series 3. Therefore, Sherlock can be read as a queer man. He does not want to have sex with women, he loves John so much that he restarts his own heart to save him, and he is jealous when he is introduced to Sholto, who can be read as John's ex-boyfriend. It is undeniable that Sherlock loves John, but, considering the scene from "His Last Vow" and other examples from this chapter, it can also be argued that he is in love with John. Through the introduction of Sholto, reading John as bisexual becomes more feasible than in Series 1 and 2. He does, again, point out that he is not gay, but he also does not mind touching Sherlock's knee (fully aware of the sexual connotation this has) and he does not suffer from homosexual panic anymore, due to his marriage. It is therefore possible to argue that his marriage is just a plot device to move the (homosocial) relationship of Sherlock and John closer to a homosexual one.

Series 3 contains many examples for why a queering of the relationship of Sherlock and John can be anticipated. The series contains more elements of female than of male television. Female television is more open to exploring alternative relationship concepts. Series 3 also introduces female characters who have more agency and who appear in more than one episode, for example Mary Morstan and Janine. Sherlock's parents, one of the few examples of a functional relationship, can also be read as being a mirror for Sherlock and John, suggesting a relationship between them could work. Series 3, despite containing an episode in which John marries a woman, is more open to a queer reading than Series 1 and 2 because it is implied through character development and symbolism, rather than through third parties drawing attention to it.

7 Conclusion

This paper tried to show that there is a queer subtext in *Sherlock* and that this subtext can almost be read as text by Series 3. This implies that Sherlock and John will enter into a romantic relationship in one of the upcoming series.

When looking at *Sherlock* in general, this is a bold suggestion. On the surface, it seems to be a conservative show, which retains nothing of the innovation of the original stories. *Sherlock* seems to be set in a neo-Victorian world, a world which mirrors the second half of the 19th century. There is still a war in Afghanistan, which is included into the show by having John being invalidated home at the beginning of “A Study in Pink”. There are still terror attacks in London, on which *Sherlock* comments in “The Empty Hearse”. Most of the crimes in the original stories as well as in *Sherlock* are minor and do not have any effect on a bigger scale, offering the audience an escape from the uncertainty of the world they live in.

Sherlock also mirrors the second half of the 19th century in its treatment of women, people of colour, and queer people. People of colour and foreigners are often reduced to stereotypes or villains, for example Soo Lin Yao in “The Blind Banker” or Charles Augustus Magnussen in “His Last Vow”, a character who used to be British in the original story, but who is Danish in *Sherlock*.

It is even possible to argue that *Sherlock* is more conservative than the books written by Arthur Conan Doyle, especially when considering how women are treated by the narrative. Women are used as a plot device to advance the stories between the male characters, for example Sally Donovan in “A Study in Pink”, who has an affair with Anderson so Sherlock can make a snide remark about him. Women are also reduced to their looks, for example Molly Hooper, whom Sherlock often tells that she does not conform to the dominant beauty standards, only to compliment her on her looks when he needs a favour. Women who are strong female characters in the original stories, for example Irene Adler, are portrayed as weak for falling in love with Sherlock and have to be rescued by the male lead when they are in danger. Even women who seem to be treated with respect, for example Mrs Hudson, turn out to have been exotic dancers and are now too old to be sexualised and therefore reduced to the role of a mother.

Sherlock is set in a world which mirrors the second half of the 19th century. However, *Sherlock* is also set in a world free of homophobia. Therefore, it is not an exact mirror image. Being queer is not something which has to be kept a secret in *Sherlock*. It is something which is accepted by everyone. A character can say that they are queer without having to experience homophobia, something which would not have been

possible in the 19th century. *Sherlock* has created a world in which queer characters are treated like people and in which they can express their sexual orientation openly without having to fear reprisals from society.

Over the last few decades, positive representation of queer characters in the media has increased steadily. Nevertheless, queer people are still often treated as stereotypes. This can also be observed when looking at Series 1. A queer man shows interest in John despite being in a relationship, following the stereotype that queer men will always make advances on other men, no matter what the circumstances are. However, Series 2 portrays a queer couple as normal people, thereby raising the visibility of queer characters.

Representing queer characters properly is also extremely important when considering how the media treats the idea of characters entering into a same-sex relationship. *Sherlock*, two fans' reimagining of the *Sherlock Holmes* stories, is critically acclaimed and celebrated. A piece of fanfiction, a fan's reimagining of *Sherlock*, and thereby also of the *Sherlock Holmes* stories, is laughed at by the media and taken as an example of how crazy fan passions are, just because Sherlock and John are in a romantic and sexual relationship. *Sherlock* could make a step into the right direction by making Sherlock and John a couple in one of the upcoming series, if only to show that something is not of inferior quality just because the two male leads are in a relationship.

So far, *Sherlock* has been walking the thin line between positive representation of queer characters and queerbaiting. From the very first episode onwards, *Sherlock* points out that Sherlock and John could be a couple. Other characters often assume they are, even though Sherlock and John do not even share a hug until "The Sign of Three". By constantly drawing attention to a queer possibility but refusing to make it explicit, *Sherlock* can be accused of queerbaiting because a queer audience, who hopes to find positive examples of representation, is gained, but not represented in the end.

In analysing six different scenes from *Sherlock* in detail, it becomes questionable if the show is really queerbaiting or if it is not establishing a queer relationship between Sherlock and John. The scene from "The Hounds of Baskerville" portrays queer people as friendly and normal, as already suggested above. Sherlock can be read as being more open to a queer possibility than John. In "The Blind Banker", the scene can be read as Sherlock asking John out, especially when considering facial expression, music, and dialogue. All three codes are in favour of reading Sherlock suggesting a date between him and John. When looking at the scene from "His Last Vow", reading

Sherlock as being in love with John becomes more feasible. Sherlock is nervous instead of scared (as he should be because he knows he is flying to his certain death) and the editing is used to create nervousness within the audience. "Sherlock is actually a girl's name" can be read as an aborted love confession, or as Sherlock telling John he is in love with him. This is supported by John telling Sherlock in "A Study in Pink" that "Harry's short for Harriet". A man turns out to be a queer woman. Sherlock seems to be trying to tell John that he can be in love with John despite being a man, challenging John's and the audience's heteronormative assumptions.

The only scene in which Sherlock is not open to a queer possibility is in the scene from "A Study in Pink", in which he rejects John's advances, telling him he wants to focus on his work. Reading this scene as John trying to express romantic and/or sexual interest in Sherlock makes it plausible to read John as feeling hurt because Sherlock rejects him. John is jealous of Irene in "A Scandal in Belgravia", possibly because he sees his homosocial bond with Sherlock threatened, but also possibly because he sees Irene as his rival and does not understand why Sherlock told him he wants to focus on his work and now flirts with Irene. In the scene from "The Sign of Three", John is clearly not scared anymore of expressing his feelings for Sherlock and therefore making other people believe they are a couple. Analysing six scenes using Fiske's television codes suggests that examples from the show can be read in a queer light and that every level of the codes suggests a queer possibility.

John's sexual orientation is much harder to determine than Sherlock's, despite Sherlock never voicing any preference at all. It is at least obvious that John is not gay, because he says so in "A Scandal in Belgravia" and "The Empty Hearse". Sherlock's sexuality is open to any interpretation. He can be read as queer, especially in connection with Moriarty, to whom he is attracted and who even arouses him in some way. The idea of Sherlock and Moriarty being a couple has even been explicitly mentioned in "The Empty Hearse". Through Moriarty, Sherlock realises how much John means to him and how far he is willing to go to defend John's life and keep him safe, a realisation which forces him to commit murder in "His Last Vow". Sherlock's sexuality is also kept ambiguous by not having him express romantic and/or sexual interest in women. Irene Adler offers to have sex with him in "A Scandal in Belgravia", but Sherlock never acknowledges her offers. In "His Last Vow", Sherlock is in a relationship with Janine for over a month without sleeping with her once because he does not want to, something which is lamented by her, even after she finds out he has just been using her.

Nothing in the narrative so far suggests that Sherlock is interested in women, but it is undeniable that he has a strong bond to John. This bond can be read as homosocial. Sherlock enjoys John's company more than anyone else's and he is unhappy when John does not spend time with him anymore after the marriage in "The Sign of Three". Sherlock undeniably *loves* John because he is willing to commit murder to keep John safe, an enormous sacrifice because it turns Sherlock into the one thing he has been fighting for three series: a criminal. To read Sherlock as being *in love* with John is made possible by the last conversation between the two in "His Last Vow" during which Sherlock tries to make a love confession, as suggested above. Sherlock is certainly open to a queer reading.

John can be read as either hetero- or bisexual. It is undeniable that John is drawn to Sherlock in one way or another because he chooses his relationship with Sherlock over his relationship with various girlfriends. Even when he is engaged to be married, he is drawn back to his old flatmate, and he storms a drug den because he misses the excitement of his life with Sherlock when they spend a month apart. These actions can all be read as a heterosexual man who craves a close homosocial bond with his best friend. A heterosexual reading of John is further supported when considering his homosexual panic, which is especially obvious in Series 1 and 2. Whenever someone suggests that he and Sherlock are a couple, John denies this, as opposed to Sherlock, who never denies it. John is scared of people thinking he could be homosexual, despite *Sherlock* being set in a world free of homophobia. John's homosexual panic only vanishes in Series 3 when he is engaged, because he can now prove that Sherlock is not his boyfriend. Series 3 is also the series in which a queer reading of John can be justified easiest.

What makes John's sexuality ambiguous, is that he seems to be trying to find out if Sherlock is single in "A Study in Pink" so he can ask him out, and that he is much more open to expressing his feelings for Sherlock when Sherlock returns in Series 3. John trying to find out if Sherlock is single and Sarah trying to find out if John is single an episode later are similar scenes. A queer reading of John in "A Study in Pink" is also supported by the fact that Sherlock deduces John's interest in him and stops his advances. Sherlock knows when people are trying to ask him out, as becomes evident in his interactions with Molly Hooper.

In Series 1 and 2, reading John as heterosexual and craving a homosocial bond with Sherlock is the most obvious possibility. In Series 3, however, it is also highly feasible to read John as bisexual. Through his engagement and, later, wedding, John becomes more at ease with showing affection for Sherlock. He tells Sherlock he is of equal

importance in his life as Mary, his fiancée. The stag night scene in “The Sign of Three” can be read as John telling Sherlock he does not mind if people think they are a couple, while simultaneously grabbing Sherlock’s knee, thereby displaying rare physical contact between them. With the introduction of James Sholto, John’s ex-commander in the army, who risks his life to attend John’s wedding, it is also possible to argue that John has had a relationship with a man in the army. John puts Sherlock and Mary on the same level, and Mary puts her and Sherlock’s relationship to John on the same level as Sholto’s relationship to John. John is therefore also open to a queer reading.

By making Sherlock and John a couple in one of the upcoming series, *Sherlock* would not only be one of the first shows to have an excellent representation of queer characters, it would also portray bisexuality in a positive light, something which hardly ever happens. John, who points out that he is not gay on more than one occasion, would not suddenly identify as homosexual when he enters into a relationship with Sherlock, which would make one of the lead characters in one of the most successful television shows ever bisexual, thereby increasing visibility of this often demonised and misrepresented sexual orientation.

The evidence presented in this paper suggests that a queering of the relationship between John and Sherlock is not far-fetched. It can be argued that it has been set up from the beginning. By keeping both John’s and Sherlock’s sexuality ambiguous and by setting *Sherlock* in a world in which homophobia does not exist, a queering can even be expected. It is even possible to say that not making Sherlock and John a couple would be queerbaiting. The possibility of Sherlock and John being in a relationship is mentioned or alluded to 27 times in nine episodes. Some instances, for example the scenes from “The Blind Banker” or “The Hounds of Baskerville”, can be read as jokes. Other instances cannot be brushed off as easily. Why do people constantly assume that Sherlock and John are a couple, both people who have known them for some time and total strangers? Why are there comparisons between Irene Adler, a gay woman who falls in love with Sherlock, and John, a man who says he is not gay and he and Sherlock are not a couple? Why does Sherlock ask to speak with John alone, only to tell him “Sherlock is actually a girl’s name”? Why does John touch Sherlock’s knee and proclaim. “I don’t mind”? If they should not become a couple, *Sherlock* can be accused of queerbaiting. A queer possibility for Sherlock and John is addressed frequently but never made explicit. By alluding to it in every episode, a queer audience is gained, but not represented.

Sherlock could be the first hugely successful *Sherlock Holmes* adaptation – an adaptation which is sold to over 240 territories worldwide, an adaptation which has

won four BAFTA's and seven Emmys, and an adaptation which is so popular, it was possible to sell out a three day convention centred on the show alone – to make Sherlock and John a couple. With this, *Sherlock* would not only represent queer people in a positive light, it would also offer a story in which queer people are presented as well-rounded characters who are defined by more than their queerness. Considering this as well as the evidence presented in this paper, which suggests that a queer reading is not only feasible but suggested by the narrative itself, it is possible to expect a queering of the relationship between John and Sherlock in one of the upcoming series.

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11 Appendix



Figure 2 Sherlock's parents in "The Empty Hearse" ("The Empty Hearse" Screenshots)



Figure 3 Sherlock in "The Hounds of Baskerville" ("The Hounds of Baskerville" Screenshot)



Figure 1 John in "A Scandal in Belgravia" ("A Scandal in Belgravia" Screenshot)

Abstract

Sherlock is a crime show, produced by Hartswood Films and distributed by the BBC. It reimagines the 56 short stories and four novels about Sherlock Holmes written by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in a 21st century setting. This MA thesis argues that *Sherlock* can be read in a queer light and that a queering of the relationship between Sherlock Holmes and John Watson is not only feasible, but also suggested by the narrative. This queer reading is supported by using arguments made by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* and Maria San Filippo in *The B Word: Bisexuality in Contemporary Film and Television*. Both works present an approach which, when applied to *Sherlock*, suggests that a queering of the relationship between Sherlock Holmes and John Watson is to be expected in one of the upcoming series. Another text which is used for the analysis is *Television Culture* by John Fiske. In applying Fiske's television codes to the show, attention is drawn to how these codes are used to evoke romance in the relationship of Sherlock and John.

The three series, which have been released so far, are analysed in detail, using four criteria: relationships, homosexual panic, women and family, and the hero and the villain. All four point to a steadily developed queering of the relationship between Sherlock and John. Queer relationships are shown to be of equal importance to heterosexual relationships. John, who displays signs of homosexual panic in the first two series, is much more open to the idea of Sherlock and him being in a relationship in Series 3. Women, who are often merely treated as a plot device in the first two series, have much more agency in Series 3, and families become the focus of Series 3, as opposed to crime solving, as in Series 1 and 2. The villains, finally, draw attention to Sherlock's queerness through their own and force Sherlock to come to terms with his feelings for John at the end of each series.

In the course of the thesis, emphasis is devoted to the fact that the narrative often points to a possible queering of the relationship between Sherlock and John without making it explicit. This is done in such an overt way that it is possible to argue that the goal is to attract a queer audience without granting them proper visibility. Should this continue, it is possible to accuse *Sherlock* of queerbaiting, of trying to gain a queer audience by making it seem as if Sherlock and John could enter into a relationship but never explicitly presenting it in this way.

In queering Sherlock and John's relationship, *Sherlock* could have an enormous impact on the current television landscape. It already contains not only good examples of positive representation of queer relationships, it is also set in a world free of homophobia. As the thesis shows, a queering of the relationship between Sherlock

and John has been suggested from the very first episode onwards. Therefore, it is possible to expect it in one of the future series.

Abstract

Sherlock ist eine Krimiserie, die von Hartswood Films produziert und von BBC vertrieben wird. Die 56 Kurzgeschichten und vier Romane, die Sir Arthur Conan Doyle über Sherlock Holmes schrieb, werden ins 21. Jahrhundert versetzt. Diese Masterarbeit erörtert, dass *Sherlock* unter einem queeren Aspekt betrachtet werden kann und dass es nicht nur möglich, sondern auch plausibel ist, die Beziehung zwischen Sherlock Holmes und John Watson explizit als queer zu interpretieren. Die queere Auslegung wird unterstützt durch Argumente von Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick aus *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* und von Maria San Filippo aus *The B Word: Bisexuality in Contemporary Film and Television*. Beide Werke, wenn sie auf *Sherlock* angewendet werden, suggerieren, dass die Beziehung zwischen Sherlock und John in eine der folgenden Staffeln von *Sherlock* explizit queer werden wird. Ein weiteres Werk, welches für die Analyse verwendet wird, ist *Television Culture* von John Fiske. Fiskes „television codes“ werden auf die Serie angewendet, um zu zeigen, wie sie Romantik in der Beziehung von Sherlock und John hervorrufen.

Die drei Staffeln, die bis jetzt veröffentlicht wurden, werden im Detail analysiert, wobei vier Kriterien zu Orientierung verwendet werden: Beziehungen, homosexuelle Panik, Frauen und Familie, und der Held und sein Gegenspieler. Alle vier zeigen, dass eine explizit queere Beziehung zwischen Sherlock und John langsam entwickelt wird. Queere Beziehungen sind ebenso wichtig wie heterosexuelle Beziehungen. John, der in den ersten beiden Staffeln noch oft Anzeichen für homosexuelle Panik an den Tag legt, ist in Staffel 3 viel offener, wenn er damit konfrontiert wird, dass er und Sherlock ein Paar sein könnten. Frauen, die in den ersten beiden Staffeln oft nur dazu benutzt werden, um die Handlung voranzubringen, haben viel mehr Handlungskompetenz in Staffel 3 und Familien sind der Mittelpunkt in der dritten Staffel; das Lösen von Fällen ist dann nur mehr von zweitrangiger Bedeutung. Die Gegenspieler, letztendlich, zeigen durch ihre eigene Queerness, dass Sherlock als queer gelesen werden kann, da sie ihn dazu bringen, seine Gefühle für John am Ende von jeder Staffel aufs Neue zu akzeptieren.

In *Sherlock* wird oft darauf hingewiesen, dass die Beziehung zwischen John und Sherlock queer sein könnte, aber sie wird nie explizit so dargestellt. Diese Darstellung ist so offensichtlich, dass es möglich ist zu argumentieren, dass sie nur dazu benutzt wird, um ein queeres Publikum zu gewinnen, ohne dieses Publikum zu repräsentieren. Sollte dies in Zukunft fortgesetzt werden, kann man sagen, dass

Sherlock queerbaiting benutzt. Es wird ein queeres Publikum angelockt indem man es so ausschaun lässt, als ob Sherlock und John eine Beziehung eingehen könnten, aber es wird nie explizit so dargestellt.

Wenn die Beziehung zwischen Sherlock und John queer werden sollte, könnte *Sherlock* einen immensen Einfluss auf die jetzige TV-Landschaft haben. Man kann jetzt schon gute Beispiele für die Darstellung von queeren Charakteren finden und *Sherlock* spielt in einer Welt, in der es keine Homophobie gibt. Diese Arbeit zeigt, dass eine queere Beziehung zwischen Sherlock und John von Anfang an angelegt ist. Deswegen ist es plausibel zu erwarten, dass die Beziehung in eine der kommenden Staffeln explizit queer gemacht wird.

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