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**BBC's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Sherlock:  
National Anxieties Uncovered**

**Hundred Twenty-Five Years Old and Still Alive**

Sherlock Holmes is a survivor. Born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he would have been long dead by now had he been a real person. Yet, Sherlock Holmes is very much alive, as the popularity of many adaptations, such as BBC's *Sherlock* (2010–) and the blockbuster film *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), prove.<sup>1</sup> The detective was first introduced in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's novel *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) and subsequently featured in more than fifty short stories and four novels. After his last appearance in Doyle's *The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes* (1927), Holmes did not die, but was kept alive: many authors and fans started writing stories about the famous sleuth. Subsequently, the introduction of the cinema in the 20<sup>th</sup> century enabled the character of Holmes to be adapted to the screen, and Holmes and his partner Watson in fact proved themselves "the most filmed characters in all of fiction", as Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat contend in an interview with Michael Leader.

In 2010, BBC took the art of adapting Holmes to the screen one step further and introduced a TV series about a modern Sherlock Holmes living in contemporary London. This Sherlock (Benedict Cumberbatch) uses his smartphone to solve crimes, prefers nicotine patches over tobacco and cocaine, and is called by his first name: Sherlock. Although this seems a rather rigorous adaptation, the detective remains authentic: "[e]verything that matters about Holmes and Watson is the same. Conan Doyle's original stories were never about frock coats and gas light. They're about brilliant detection, dreadful villains and blood-curling crimes – and frankly, the hell with the crinoline", Moffat contends ("BBC to Make"). Colin Fleming agrees: Benedict Cumberbatch "is at once

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<sup>1</sup> In fact, the character Sherlock Holmes has even inspired contemporary TV-makers to create autonomous television characters such as The Doctor in *Doctor Who* (2005–2010) and Gregory House in *House MD* (2005–), who are essentially adaptations of the 19th century consulting detective Holmes, as Louisia Stein and Kristine Busse argue (20-21).

Holmes as we think of Holmes—enigmatic, vain, arrogant, compassionate, theatrical, sober, lively, somber, paradoxical—and yet unlike any previous iteration of the detective” (66). Somehow we can thus still identify this modern Sherlock, who is emerged in the digital age, as an authentic Sherlock, which implies the existence of an underlying essence that constitutes the character Sherlock, which BBC apparently managed to capture.

That brings me to my main questions: how has Sherlock Holmes changed from a 19<sup>th</sup> century to a 21<sup>st</sup> century detective without losing his essence? To help answer this question, I will investigate to what extent Sherlock could be considered an outlaw hero – a specific character that was often used in, but not limited to, early American Cinema Westerns. Inherent in the idea of the outlaw hero lays the outlaw hero-official hero conflict, which is often used as a displacement for a national anxiety. I will therefore conclude my paper by assessing whether this conflict is indeed a displacement, what it seeks to displace and to what extent this displacement adds to the detective’s essence.

### **From Novel to Television**

Putting Sherlock Holmes in the 21<sup>st</sup> century obviously asks for transformations due to the technical improvements and scientific discoveries of the last century. Thus, modern Sherlock has replaced his telegrams for a smartphone and searches the internet for information instead of looking it up in his books. Subsequently, a new era denotes a culture that has been modernised up to a point that some of Holmes 19<sup>th</sup> century idiosyncrasies have become out of date or unfavourable: among others things, Sherlock has quit smoking and uses nicotine patches, there is no mention of his old cocaine and morphine habit, and, as Elizabeth Evans points out, his sexual identity seems more “fluid”, whereas Holmes’ sexuality is “predominantly absent in the stories” (109). Nonetheless, Lindsay Faye argues that

[w]hen Benedict Cumberbatch steeples his fingers before his lips in thought, or blithely assures Mrs. Hudson that the game is on, or sits quietly monastic and aloof while Martin Freeman as his John Watson indulges in a hasty meal, fans . . . inevitably will notice and appreciate these canonical flourishes. No *particular* flourish is cardinal, however, to the character as a whole. (5)

Although some characteristics, thus, seem typical Sherlockish, the persona Sherlock Holmes is not merely based on a combination of certain traits. Rather, something deeper must be present that constitutes the essence of the detective's character.

In his famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility", Walter Benjamin introduces the concept of 'aura', similar to 'essence', which is a work of art's "unique existence in a particular time and place" (1053). The original is not an autonomous object, but an object that reveals its context too. For instance, the damage to a statue is part of the statue and renders it authentic. Generally, Benjamin argues, the original is more unique than its reproduction, with exception to technological reproductions, such as photographs. In these cases, the reproduction is capable of "bringing out aspects of the original" that are invisible to the human eye (1054). *Sherlock*, for instance, allows Sherlock's thoughts to appear on screen by putting words over the images,<sup>2</sup> thereby enhancing the original and becoming unique itself. Moreover, *Sherlock*'s episode titles bear minor changes, denoting that *Sherlock* is not a replica, but a new work of art that bears remnants of the original.<sup>3,4</sup> However, although these examples enlighten Benjamin's idea of essence, they apply to the overall essence of the story, rather than the specific essence of the main protagonist. Therefore, I will now focus exclusively on the discrepancies and similarities between Holmes and Sherlock.<sup>5</sup>

Holmes is represented as a character that seems both divine and primitive. On the one hand, Holmes is a mysterious, superhuman hero: we know little about his past, he uses cocaine because it is "transcendently stimulating and clarifying for the mind" (*Sign 2*, my emphasis), and Watson often refers to Holmes' analytical qualities as "powers". He beholds Holmes as a mystery that needs to be unravelled (*Study 15*), and throughout the novels, time and again he continues to be struck by Holmes' profound knowledge and analyses. Moreover,

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<sup>2</sup> For instance, when Sherlock examines the murdered Jennifer Wilson, we see both the ring on the victim's finger and Sherlock's thoughts and deductions in the form of words like "polished" and "unhappily married" floating over the screen ("A Study in Pink").

<sup>3</sup> For instance, *A Study in Scarlet* is transformed in "A Study in Pink" and "A Scandal in Bohemia" in "A Scandal in Belgravia".

<sup>4</sup> Paradoxically, although Benjamin contends that mass production "devalued" the concept of the "original" (1054), sales of Doyle's adventures of Sherlock increased significantly after the introduction of *Sherlock*, as Paul Jones shows. In this particular case the reproduction actually renews the value of the original.

<sup>5</sup> Just to be clear: in Doyle's stories the detective is referred to as Holmes. In *Sherlock* he is referred to as Sherlock. In my paper I will use their names accordingly.

Holmes prefers cold reason above emotions (*Sign* 152), hence his lack of interest in women and marriage, which invokes Watson's remark "[t]here is something positively inhuman in you at times" (17). Most importantly, Holmes continuously seems the only one who is capable of solving cases that were hitherto impossible to solve, which renders him almost divine. On the other hand, Holmes is flawed. Watson is struck by this paradox:

His ignorance was as remarkable as his knowledge. Of contemporary literature, philosophy and politics he appeared to know next to nothing. . . My surprise reached a climax, however, when I found that he was ignorant of the Copernican Theory and of the composition of the Solar System. (*Study* 15)

Although Holmes is depicted almost godlike, he remains no more than a human being, a contrast that continues throughout the novels.

BBC's Sherlock is portrayed almost similarly, yet Sherlock seems less divine: Watson's function in the novels is to primarily narrate the stories, help Holmes with his cases, and keep an eye on Holmes' use of morphine and cocaine, however, the BBC series highlight the relationship between Sherlock and John. Sherlock is dependent on John and is thereby represented as more vulnerable and human than his predecessor Holmes. John needs to guide Sherlock through society because Sherlock is ignorant of its rules.<sup>6</sup> In fact, as Ariana Scott-Zechlin rightly observes, "[w]ithout John to guide him, Sherlock is Moriarty [Sherlock's archenemy] – inhumane and indifferent, caring only about puzzles and never people" (64). The adapted Sherlock seems, actually, more complex than Holmes, since John takes a greater part in the constitution of Sherlock's character: Sherlock's two-sidedness is magnified, compared to Holmes. This two-sidedness is characteristic for the Classical Hollywood outlaw hero, which I shall explore further.

### **Sherlock as an Outlaw Hero**

Robert Ray contends that early American Cinema has adopted myths from 19<sup>th</sup> century American fiction. These myths are actually based on national ideologies, for example, the idea that America is the land of possibilities. Many of these myths, however, oppose each other (56-7). American Cinema solved the

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<sup>6</sup> Sherlock, for example, bumps into someone, but John is the one who says "sorry" ("A Study in Pink").

incompatibility of such myths, not by making a choice between two myths, but by embracing them both: “[m]eet me in St. Louis,” Ray illustrates, “overcame the opposition inherent in the myth of family (encouraging contentment and permanence) and the myth of success (encouraging ambition and mobility)” (57). American Cinema, thus, reconciles oppositions. Simply put, the audience does not have to choose between the bad or good guy: the bad guy is both bad and good – the gangster can be both a coward and brave, the violin player both sensitive and a tough boxer (58). The reconciliation of incompatible myths most clearly emerges in the outlaw hero-official hero opposition, in which the dichotomy of the individual and the community becomes apparent, which is one of America’s most traditional myths (58).

In his text, Ray mainly focusses on the Western through which this reconciliation can be recognised in the figure of the cowboy, which is a typical example of the outlaw hero, as he explains in the chapter “The Thematic Paradigm – The Resolution of Incompatible Values”. However, this reconciliatory pattern is not limited to Westerns, but “increasingly became the self-perpetuating norm of the American Cinema” (57). Although *Sherlock* is neither a Western, nor a US production, the BBC series did attempt to produce a series that was fit to compete with US quality television. In fact, Ray reveals that British producers even have emulated US quality content to successfully compete in this “global marketplace” (112), which Evans acknowledges:

*Sherlock*, and the construction of the central character especially, embodies a combination of modernity and heritage that brings together two traditions of “quality television”: the U.S. tradition of glossy, psychological deep and complex drama and the UK tradition of “prestige” through heritage and literary adaptation. (111)<sup>7</sup>

The BBC thus imitates elements of American film and television to compete in a world in which many American series penetrated the British market. Consequently, it is likely that the American Western, or the concept of the outlaw hero in general, has influenced the constitution of BBC’s “psychological deep” *Sherlock*.

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<sup>7</sup> Quality television, she further explains, is about “psychological deep characters”, “recombining traditional TV formulas” and complex narratives, among others (112).

Ray enumerates three competing values that are associated with the outlaw hero-official hero conflict: aging, society and women, and politics and the law. These characteristics of the outlaw hero reveal the ideology of childhood, which holds that “a mere falling short of adulthood is a guarantee of insight and even innocence” (Fiedler qtd. in Ray 59), “an ideological anxiety about civilized life” (60), and “a profound pessimism about the individual’s access to the legal system” (62). All three value sets are part of the bigger ideology of individual versus community.

Ray elaborates on the ideologies of childhood and society: “while the outlaw heroes represented a flight from maturity,” he argues, “the official heroes embodied the best attributes of adulthood: sound reasoning and judgement, wisdom and sympathy based on experience” (59-60). Moreover, the outlaw hero distrusts civilisation, which is represented by his lack of interest in women (except for uncompromising relationships with women who are basically outlaws too) and often, the outlaw hero only has relationships with male friends (60). In other words, the outlaw hero is presented as childish and unattached, whereas the official hero is the responsible parent.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, Sherlock is depicted by the BBC as childish, as Scott-Zechlin points out:<sup>9</sup>

John’s depiction of Sherlock as an ignorant child is quickly corroborated by Sherlock’s childish teddy bear imagery, delivered in a juvenile mocking tone. Likewise, both Lestrade and John remark in John’s fictional online blog on how, “like a child, he doesn’t understand the rules of society” (February 7, 2010; [www.johnwatsonblog.co.uk](http://www.johnwatsonblog.co.uk)) and Sherlock himself constructs a view of London populated with villains and archenemies, as if he were the hero of a storybook. (61)

Sherlock thus is portrayed as childish, but he is also presented as someone who “doesn’t understand the rules of society”, thereby placing him outside society.

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<sup>8</sup> Ray presents the ideology of childhood and the ideology of civilised life as different sets of values. I think, however, that these are inseparable. Childhood is opposed to adulthood. Adulthood is growing up, settling down, responsibility, and therefore part of society.

<sup>9</sup> Holmes, however, cannot be called strictly childish or mature. The BBC took effort to make Sherlock more childish. For example, the conversation about the solar system is quickly dropped by Watson, while John depicts Sherlock as an ignorant child (Scott-Zechlin 61).

Furthermore, when Sherlock is asked for his help, he is happy as a child, crying “the game is on”, as if it is just a children’s game and not a brutal murder (“A Study in Pink”). He also refers to the difficulties of solving this murder as “fun”, something a child would say about a game, rather than an adult who is referring to a murder.

In contrast with the outlaw hero as described by Ray, Sherlock *does* know how to use his reason: he outwits everyone. In fact, as Scott-Zechlin argues, his childishness is his “greatest strength”, since he looks at the world with an open mind (61), which complies with the American Cinema’s ideology of childhood. Sherlock is repeatedly struck by everyone’s lack of understanding: “what’s it like in your funny little brains? It must be so boring.” (“A Study in Pink”). It is exactly because the official hero, Lestrade, is *not* childish that accounts for his incapability to solve his cases without the help of Sherlock, as he himself admits in the first ten minutes of *Sherlock*’s first episode: “we try to find [a link]”, after which he is immediately interrupted by a childish text message from Sherlock. Finding the link proves exclusively possible for Sherlock throughout the series though.

Sherlock, consequently, glorifies the idea of childhood by his ignorance of social rules and common knowledge, his childish behaviour, and his indifference to women.<sup>10</sup> The latter also reveals an anxiety about civilized life and society. He is not interested in women and has only John as his friend. When Sherlock does fall for a woman, in “A Scandal in Belgravia”, it is Irene Adler, a dominatrix who is essentially Sherlock’s counterpart: an outlaw too. Irene is rather an accomplice in Sherlock’s flight from society than a woman who lures him into married life.

The third set of values that Ray mentions is the hostility towards politics and law. The outlaw has “private standards of right and wrong”, whereas “the official hero offer[s] the admonition, ‘You cannot take the law into your own hands’” (62). The latter is exactly what Sherlock does when he refuses to call the police when John asks: “Have you talked to the police?” Sherlock responds with: “Four people are dead. There is no time to talk to the police”, thereby showing

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<sup>10</sup> His indifference can, for example, be seen in his unawareness of the love Molly feels for him and her flirtations. When she dresses herself nicely for him, Sherlock remarks: “Are you wearing lipstick?” unaware of the fact that she’s wearing it to impress him. When she comes back with the lipstick removed he, again, shows his ignorance of social rules by saying to the poor girl: “Your mouth’s too small now” (“Study in Pink”). He just does not know that he should not embarrass Molly like that.

both his ignorance of society's rules and his disbelief in the law: either he does not know that it is legally required to talk to the police if you have information about a case, or he does not believe they are capable of doing something useful with his information. Moreover, he does not perceive the law as an instrument of justice, but as a set of rules that invites him to play games in which he can show his wits. Sherlock does not hesitate to use violence to get information from the cabby – information he needs for his own puzzle.

Ray states that the underlying “outlaw mythology portrayed the law, the sum of society's standards, as a collective, impersonal ideology imposed on the individual from without” (62). If the law is basically a device of community, it is unsurprising that Sherlock cannot exactly distinguish between right and wrong. Mycroft's conclusion about his brother Sherlock at the end of the first episode is exemplary for the dichotomy between the individual and community: “[the public] is never your motivation, is it?” As long as Sherlock can get something from community and vice versa, these entities reconcile. This is the case when society, personified by the executioners of the law, the police, falls short and the individual – Sherlock – is called in temporarily. Sherlock, however, remains an individual outside community, and is as a consequence flawed in his capability of understanding community, resulting in a blurred vision of right and wrong, which is why he breaks the cabby's arm and refuses to call the police.

Ray asserts the implications of the antithetical hero traditions: “[i]f the outlaw tradition promised adventure and freedom, it also offered danger and loneliness. If the official tradition promised safety and comfort, it also offered entanglements and boredom” (62-3). It is exactly this boredom and these entanglements that the detective tries to defeat: he either solves difficult cases, which always result in an adventure with many dangers, or he uses three nicotine patches simultaneously “to enlighten the mind” (“Study in Pink”). This is what chiefly accounts for Sherlock being an outlaw hero: his unwillingness and incapability to settle into a boring, banal life without adventures or danger. This causes him to never fully become a part of society.

However, as mentioned earlier, American Cinema had the tendency to reconcile opposing myths, which became an authority on his own. This resulted in two-sided heroes: “stories modified the outlaw hero's most potentially damaging quality, his tendency to selfish isolationism, by demonstrating that, however reluctantly, he would act for causes beyond himself” (Ray 64). This

characteristic is recognised in Sherlock's development from a merely selfish person to someone who incidentally cares about others, namely: John.<sup>11</sup> He is the typical hero who is both bad (or I would rather say: uncivilised) and good. As noted earlier, Sherlock is selfish: he solves crimes for his own sake, not to help society or even to earn money.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, when he later hears that the victim's daughter is dead, he is excited and utters rapidly: "when, where, why?", not giving a second thought to the tragedy of losing a child, but only thinking of his own puzzle that needs to be solved.

However, when John's life is in danger, in the first season's finale, "The Great Game", Sherlock saves John instead of choosing for himself. In the second season Sherlock even sacrifices himself to save John. At times Sherlock does seem to turn into the "good man" that Lestrade believes he can become ("Study in Pink"). However, Sherlock complies with what Ray calls "the typical incarnation" of the "reconciliatory pattern":

the story of the private man attempting to keep from being drawn into action *on any but his own terms*. . . [T]he reluctant hero's ultimate willingness to help the community satisfie[s] the official values. But by portraying this aid as demanding only temporary involvement, the story preserve[s] the values of individualism as well. (65, my emphasis)

Thus, Sherlock remains puller of the strings, even when he appears to sacrifice himself, and thereby refuses to surrender to society. Sherlock ultimately remains a two-sided character that is both good and bad.

Although American Cinema avoided making choices, its "tendency to minimize the official hero's role (by making him dependent on the outsider's intervention)" suggests that "the national ideology clearly preferred the outlaw" (Ray 66). Indeed, Lestrade needs Sherlock, and although Sherlock needs Lestrade too, Sherlock is capable of finding his own cases by means of John's blog and his own internet site. The BBC series thus reveals an underlying ideology that prefers the outlaw hero, thereby glorifying the individual man rather than community.

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<sup>11</sup> BBC has actually focussed on the relationship between Sherlock and John, which was not there in the books by Doyle.

<sup>12</sup> This is another typical outlaw hero trait: we never know how Sherlock earns his money, or he seems to just do nothing. In the books, however, Holmes' adventures and cases are presented as a job; Doyle exactly describes how much money Holmes earns: "Then, as to money?" Holmes asks. "There are three hundred pound in gold, and seven hundred in notes", Holmes' client responds (*Adventures* 13).

Interestingly, Christopher Le Coney and Zoe Trodd argue in their essay, “Reagan’s Rainbow Rodeos: Queer Challenges to the Cowboy Dreams of Eighties America”, how the image of the traditional cowboy has changed throughout the years from a masculine, heterosexual man to a man open for homosexual romance. In Doyle’s novels nothing in the text suggests something more than friendship between Holmes and Watson; however, *Sherlock* repeatedly provides ambiguous indications that Sherlock and John’s friendship is more romantic. This romantic ambivalence throughout the series seems to critically reflect on the concept of hero itself. In the beginning of the first episode, for instance, Mrs. Hudson remarks: “there’s another bedroom upstairs. If you’ll need two bedrooms”. Shortly thereafter she confesses to John, winking: “my husband is just the same”, to which John responds that he and Sherlock are not a couple. The waiter in the café, later, calls John Sherlock’s “date”, and subsequently asks if they need a table for two that is more romantic. Even Sherlock himself seems undetermined about what their relationship is. In response to Lestrade’s question to who John is, Sherlock repeatedly evades the question by iterating, “he’s with me”, which seems a rather ambivalent answer.<sup>13</sup> It seems as if *Sherlock*, again, reconciles opposing myths: the myth of the traditional cowboy as a heterosexual, masculine man, and the modern cowboy as gay, open for homoerotic relationships.

Additionally, even Sherlock himself reflects on the concept of hero, as Scott-Zechlin points out, “Heroes don’t exist, and if they did, I wouldn’t be one of them,” thereby deconstructing “the romantic worldview that still existed during the Victorian era” of unflawed heroes. In fact, it is *because* Sherlock is flawed that he is exactly a modern hero (60): both his shortcomings and ambiguous sexuality render him a modern two-sided hero.

### **Reason, Science and the Digital Age**

As I have explained, the underlying ideology that is revealed by the outlaw hero-official hero conflict is the reconciliation between opposing myths of the individual and community, represented by the individual, Sherlock, who tries to find his way through society. Robert Ray, moreover, contends that

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<sup>13</sup> A straightforward answer would have been “my flatmate”, and would not have caused any ambiguity.

[a]s a form, the western served as one of the principal displacement mechanisms in a culture obsessed with the inevitable encroachments on its gradually diminishing space. By portraying the advancing society's abiding dependence on the frontier's most representative figure—the individualistic, outlaw hero—the pure western reassured its audience about the permanent availability of both sets of values. (75)

In other words, the outlaw hero helped people feel secure in a changing society that frightened them. Ray shows a list between the different set of values, such as freedom-restriction, integrity-compromise, and tradition-change (74). The cowboy was a figure who assured people they were able to embrace both sets of values, causing them to avoid immersion in the new set of values imposed by society. For example, in an age that on the one hand labels everyone, but on the other hand has never been more diverse regarding sexualities and sexual relationships, Sherlock's fluid sexual identity reassures the public that it is okay not to fit in any of the boxes. Unsurprisingly, the rapid scientific and technical developments of the last centuries caused society to change quickly. This resulted in national fears, both visible in the characters Holmes and Sherlock, as I will explain now.

In Doyle's stories the reconciliation between two sets of opposing values was already visible even before the birth of the American Western. According to Michael Saler, Holmes is a "victim of modern reason", as was his creator Doyle, who was ambivalent about modernity too. On the one hand, Doyle embraced rationalism and scepticism, but on the other hand, he could not live in a world without a higher entity to guide him (608). Holmes is this higher entity by using his rationality in a way that almost renders him magical, as I discussed in the beginning of this paper. Thereby, "adults could indulge their imaginations without losing their reason" (617). Moreover, Ellen Harrington adds that Doyle enables the reader to "escape from larger social concerns" (73), such as "the increasing anxiety over crime, including violence from abroad" (72). Doyle supplants these fears by something tangible – a wronged lover, for instance – that can be controlled and therefore is less frightening. Similarly, looming threats in modern society, such as terrorist bombers, are in *Sherlock* traced back to just one man: the master criminal Moriarty, who has a personal conflict with

Sherlock. Thereby, modern anxieties are mitigated and become less frightening, offering the reader an escape.<sup>14</sup>

A chief distinction between Holmes and Sherlock is that Holmes mainly uses his reason, knowledge and science, whereas Sherlock's knowledge is limited. Rather, Sherlock reads people and places and "often relies on information gathered via online sources to render his deductions into a coherent picture" (Kustritz and Kohnen 94). Sherlock, thus, knows how to navigate through the overload of information that is imposed on us in the digital age. Holmes is partly represented as an earthly human who just happens to know how to use his reason, thereby showing and reassuring the readers that they can do it too (Scott-Zechlin 61; Saler 615). He says that the science of deduction can "be acquired by long and patient study", however, "life [is not] long enough to allow any mortal to attain the highest possible perfection in it" (*Study* 20), thereby implying he is just a mortal human being, just as we are. Rendering Sherlock as a detective who uses science and forensics to solve cases would miss the whole point of Sherlock as a guide through contemporary digital society. Rather, Sherlock, like us, could drown in the sea of information, but he shows that if you "find patterns in the chaos of data" (Kustritz and Kohnen 96), you can turn something frightening and overwhelming into something useful.<sup>15</sup> As Scott-Zechlin points out, Sherlock is a light that guides us through the dark; literally, his pale complexion enlightens the contrasting darkness that surrounds us (60).

A scene which is exemplary of current society and its underlying national anxieties is the scene in which John is summoned to get into a car, after he has just been followed by street camera's that have revealed his exact location to an unknown person. When John enters the car, a young woman is sitting there who is using her smartphone uninterrupted. She barely looks at John or her surroundings. When John asks for her name, she responds with "Anthea". John subsequently asks her: "is that your real name?" to which she says "no". "My

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<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, after 50 years of Bondfilms that are mostly about nuclear weapons and similar large threats, *Skyfall* minimizes the plot to a personal matter+ thereby, firstly, enabling the viewer to forget about current national fears imposed by organisations, such as terrorist attacks and violation of privacy. Secondly, M's statement "it's not about countries anymore" captures the whole paradigmatic shift of imposing threats from impersonal devices to personal threats.

<sup>15</sup> This underlying anxiety, moreover, is two-sided: we do not only fear drowning in all this information that is imposed on us, but we also fear that "we would be lost" if we would not have "access to this data" (Kustritz and Kohnen 97). Becoming lost is exactly what happens when Sherlock cannot find what he is looking for on the internet (97).

name is John,” John mutters, in order to start a conversation. She responds, without looking up: “I know”, thereby ending the conversation before it has even begun (“A Study in Pink”). The scene illustrates the individual’s detachment from community. On the one hand, people are obscured: they hide behind nicknames and false identities. Face-to-face communication is almost impossible with a mobile phone beeping all the time.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, people are more vulnerable than ever: everyone’s identity is out there in the open. The girl knows everything about John; however, when she meets him later, she has no memory of him, since she was too busy with her phone earlier to get to know him personally.

### **Conclusion**

As I have discussed in this paper, Sherlock is not merely a combination of modernised traits. He is more complex than Holmes, due to the reinforcement of his contrasting traits, which is a result of Hollywood’s tendency of reconciling incompatible myths of the individual and community, a tendency that is adopted by British television. Both Holmes’ and Sherlock’s characters and their conflicts function as a displacement for underlying national anxieties. In the case of Sherlock, these can be brought back to both the absence of community and the fear of threats within community. In Holmes case, reason and its complications were a fear itself. Holmes and Sherlock are entities that feel these fears too, however, they find their way through society. Holmes uses science and knowledge to bring order in society’s chaos whereas Sherlock uses his ability to link and filter information. Both protagonists are factors that bind the individual to the community, without compromising their autonomy.

While Sherlock Holmes’ essence is thus not limited to a set of character traits, these traits do help identify the original in the reproduction, which is part of Sherlock’s aura. Sherlock is thereby both familiar and new: the familiarity a relieve in contemporary society’s chaos.

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<sup>16</sup> The inability to maintain a conversation is further mocked by Mycroft when John finally arrives. John’s phone is constantly beeping because Sherlock is texting him. Mycroft remarks cynically, “I hope I’m not distracting you,” thereby mocking the fact that he is the only one who actually does commit to a conversation, without being busy with other things at the same time.

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