A Study in Crime
Victorian and Contemporary Criminality in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes Narratives and BBC’s Sherlock

By
Aviva Dassen
S2198029

Supervisor: Dr Tekla Mecsnober
Date of Completion: 29 June 2015
Word count: 17,145 words

Master’s Dissertation Literary Studies
Programme Writing, Editing and Mediating
Department of English Language and Culture
Rijksuniversiteit Groningen
Table of Contents

Introduction ................................................................................................................................................. 3

Chapter One: Class, Profession, and “Charles Augustus Milverton” .................................................. 12

Chapter Two: Race, Terrorism, and A Study in Scarlet ......................................................................... 25

Chapter Three: Gender, Sexuality, and “A Scandal in Bohemia” ......................................................... 39

Conclusion .................................................................................................................................................. 51

Works Cited .............................................................................................................................................. 55
**Introduction**

The Victorians were obsessed with crime. In the late nineteenth century, this British obsession seeped its way into media of all sorts: newspapers, comic strips, theatre, and most prominently in novels and short stories. We are still reminded of this fact today, as many Victorian crime stories have survived the ages through adaptations for cinema and television. Most notably, the Victorians left a literary legacy: Sherlock Holmes, the consulting detective first imagined by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in *A Study in Scarlet* in 1887. By now Holmes has gained celebrity status, featuring in novels, films, and on television. One of these adaptations is BBC’s *Sherlock*, a 2010 reimagining of the Victorian Holmes canon, which adapts the stories to the twenty-first century.

In addition to this continuous popularity in popular culture, Doyle’s creation has served as a useful topic for scholarly analysis of the role of the detective, drug use, Victorian conventions, and the like. Rarely, however, has the Sherlock Holmes canon been examined to gain insights in the criminal context surrounding the narratives. Yet, there are many reasons for this aspect to arouse scholarly interest, as Doyle frequently incorporated real-life occurrences into his fiction. For instance, in extensive newspaper searches executed for this thesis, it appeared that there is a likely real-life inspiration for the murder method and motivations of the perpetrator in *A Study in Scarlet*: the Wimbledon Poisoning Case, which attracted a wide news coverage from 1881 to 1882. These sorts of findings, which will also be discussed in detail below, add credibility to the claim that information about the social climate of Victorian England can be obtained via the Holmes stories. This thesis will take such an approach to serve as a study of crime in the late-Victorian era by applying a methodology in alignment with Stephen Greenblatt’s theoretical approach of New Historicism.
Although this dissertation will investigate the Victorian context of the stories, it will also go beyond the nineteenth century: it will use the 2010 adaptation Sherlock as a foil to uncover some salient differences between the Victorian and the twenty-first-century context. The highly acclaimed BBC television series, created by Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat, places the detective in the present-day context, making Sherlock Holmes a modern man who uses modern gadgets and contemporary science to solve his cases. The audience for both contexts is comparable: Doyle’s Holmes stories were published in magazines, the mainstream channel for entertainment in the Victorian period, which serves the same function as television today.

Given the changing legal landscape in the Victorian era – as a result of many police acts and the ‘development of Britain as a modern police state’ (Purchase 158) – it is unsurprising that the Victorians occupied themselves with crime. Criminality became an increasingly public issue after 1829, when Home Secretary Robert Peel implemented the Metropolitan Police Act in London (Purchase 70). There was a growing public discussion of crime; in addition to annual crime statistics, newspapers published frequent, detailed reports and speculations on crime (Wiener 15-16). Additionally, there was a growing intolerance towards certain types of crimes that were previously not defined as criminal (Taylor 74), such as prostitution, begging, and drunkenness (Thomas 1). It was in this context that Peel received support for the establishment of a policing authority, and in 1829 he drafted his Metropolitan Police Act, which called for a reorganised police force.

When the revised Act was accepted, Britain established more constabularies and granted the officers more power: a policeman was allowed ‘to take into Custody, without a Warrant, all loose, idle, and disorderly Persons whom he shall find disturbing the public Peace’ (“Metropolitan Police Act 1839” 516). Yet, police officers still did not always live up to the physical requirements, were undisciplined, received little to no formal training, and
were generally unfit for their jobs (Taylor 72). This gave rise to a distrust in the legal force and at the same time increased the interest in crime in literature and journalism (Snyder 104).

In fact, long before 1886 – when Sir Arthur Conan Doyle started writing his Sherlock Holmes stories – several publications demonstrated this attraction to crime. One of these was Thomas Mayhew’s influential 1851 publication *London Labour and the London Poor*, which consisted of a series of articles examining the London lower class. Publications such as these indicated the necessity to specify the criminal underworld. As many power structures in Victorian society revolved around three main parameters – class, race, and gender – it is unsurprising that the image of the criminal was constructed according to these parameters as well. Mayhew’s book, for instance, aimed to investigate the lower classes of London, and, in doing so, distinguished the criminal underclass from the poor (Thomas 5), as this line was rather vague (Wiener 23). With his book, Mayhew ‘opened the doors of [his] middle-class readers on the worlds of crime and deprivation’ (Thomas 8).

In addition to class, race was also seen as intricately connected to the perception of the criminal. The use of ‘race’ in this context requires some definition. Whereas today race is mainly considered on the basis of skin colour, in Victorian Britain it was a much wider concept. The Victorians defined it not only in terms of skin colour and, but also ‘in terms which frequently slipped across categories of “race” and “nation”’ (Purchase 114). In fact, ‘race became far more than a biological concept: race and culture were dangerously linked’ (Bolt 9). In other words, it extended to practices, nationality, religion, and behaviour. The Irish, for instance, were seen as a completely different race of people ‘on account of accent, clothing, politics, [religion, and] cultural differences’ (Swift 417). The same was true for people who subscribed to a not traditionally British religion such as Catholicism, Islam, or Judaism (Purchase 115). Most importantly for this thesis, the criminal in general was regarded
and treated in terms pertaining to race (Taylor 49). This thesis will use this broader definition when discussing the concept of race in the Victorian era.

Lastly, the third parameter that will be discussed in relation to the criminal is gender. In the Victorian age, there was a clear dichotomy when analysing crime in this light, as the Victorians set aside different types of crimes for men and women. Women’s crimes were classified as ‘moral crimes’, and included infanticide, habitual drunkenness, and prostitution. These indicated a certain moral degeneracy (Wiener 245). Men, on the other hand, were more frequently associated with crimes pertaining to demonstrations and abuse of bodily power, such as homicide, burglary, and physical assault. The level of tolerance that the Victorians had for male and female criminals was dichotomous as well. Since the physical qualities of male crime were often regarded as an extension of the ideal male, they were taken more lightly, whereas, in the case of women, criminal activity was seen as a sign of moral degradation and thus the opposite of the ideal female.

However, the public’s interest in crime did not only show through the frequency of crime reports, but also through the style of reporting, as the papers ‘institutionalized [homicide] as popular entertainment, a spectator sport’ (Tromp 582). The shift in style was marked by ‘a movement away from the descriptive forms of news’, and the press became ‘more interested in advocacy, sensationalism and entertainment’ (Franklin 41). This did not only become obvious through differences in style and tone, but also manifested itself in the topics reported on, such as homicide. Moreover, the prominence of interest in crime and horror as a source of entertainment is most appropriately demonstrated by literary genres such as detective fiction, sensation fiction, ‘Newgate novels’, and penny dreadfuls. These types of texts are of academic interest, as they can provide ‘a wealth of social detail’ and insights in Victorian society (Tromp 582). For instance, it has been suggested that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, has ‘compensated’ for the failures of the real
London police in the notorious Jack the Ripper murders of 1888 and that the stories calmed public distress (Snyder 104). This demonstrates the social function that such narratives can fulfil. Doyle in particular serves as an excellent illustration for this purpose, ‘because he lavished a hundred little touches of real knowledge’ on the Holmes stories (Chesterton 273).

Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle, who lived from 22 May 1859 till 7 July 1930, was the creator of the world-famous detective Sherlock Holmes and his friend and chronicler John Watson. Doyle published the first Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, in 1887. Doyle had always been a fan of detective stories, but he disliked how the detective came to his conclusions ‘by some chance of fluke’ without any real reasoning behind it (Fox). Doyle was determined to do it differently, adding a scientific point of view and elevating detective work to a level ‘near an exact science’ (Snyder 104). He found the solution to this problem in Dr Joseph Bell. Bell was one of Doyle’s professors in medical school, and it is his talent of deductive reasoning that lies at the basis of Holmes’s abilities. He imagined how Dr Bell’s deductive reasoning could be applied to detective work to fill in the gaps in detective fiction: ‘if he was to come into the detective business [...] he’d get the thing by building it up scientifically’ (Fox), which is exactly what Sherlock Holmes does. In other words, Doyle adapted a real-life model to match a fictional setting in accordance with the conventions of the detective story.

Holmes was not the only character with roots in reality, though. More people and organisations were fictionalised, which entailed that certain changes had to be made to match Doyle’s narratives. It is for this reason that the Sherlock Holmes stories become a fruitful source to uncover a ‘wealth of social detail’ (Tromp 582). It is unsurprising to find such an extensive real-life influence in Doyle’s writing, as ‘with an appetite voracious and indiscriminate, he had devoured newspapers and magazines since his teenage years’ (Cornwall and Arrington 160), and he was renowned for investigating other actual police
cases, to the extent that he proved two convicts innocent through his own investigation and examination of evidence (Haycraft 52). Some of the Holmes villains, such as Irene Adler, Professor James Moriarty, and Charles Augustus Milverton, are based on real-life models. The same is the case for the Danite Mormons central to A Study in Scarlet. These are the primary subjects that will be used in this thesis to showcase the relationship between Victorian society and Doyle’s fiction.

This proposes the key word that lies central to this thesis: adaptation. As stated before, in Doyle’s original Holmes stories, the persons and organisations are not merely taken from reality and placed into the story as they were in reality. On the contrary, some of the names and characteristics are transferred, but many other original characteristics of these people are changed to fit the story and the social context. This use of adaptation makes it possible to determine the ‘touch of the real’, which is central to the theoretical approach of New Historicism (Gallagher and Greenblatt 20). As briefly mentioned before, this thesis will adopt a methodology based on New Historicism for a thorough investigation of the Victorian and modern-day context. In the New Historicist view, every piece of writing reflects conventions and ideologies of its own age (Gallagher 38). Writing, in other words, is informed by societal conventions, which implies that the elements included in writing are of relevance to the audience. This is exactly the case in the Sherlock Holmes narratives, which is why these stories in particular are useful to map out the perceptions of criminals in the late-Victorian era.

In New Historicist theory, ‘[the] task of understanding [the cultural context of a text] depends not on the extraction of an abstract set of principles, and still less on the application of a theoretical model, but rather on an encounter with the singular, the specific, and the individual’ (Gallagher and Greenblatt 6). Thus, rather than prescribing a set methodology for the analysis of texts, every text ought to be approached as an individual entity and analysed.
with an approach appropriate for that specific analysis. This approach aims to uncover the cultural surroundings, and in order to do that uses parallel texts to examine the work’s context. For further explanation of these contexts, ‘canonical works of art are brought into relation not only with works judged as minor, but also with texts that are not by anyone’s standard literary’ (Gallagher and Greenblatt 10). In addition, every text, whether it be literary or non-literary, ought to be read ‘as constituents of historical discourses’ (Gallagher 37). In other words, any type of text makes up part of the socio-historical context of its time, and the more personal, subjective texts are valued highly. For this reason, newspaper articles, journals, and diaries can be considered equally valuable as the works which have been canonised as more important (Gallagher and Greenblatt 10).

As New Historicism values newspapers as an appropriate methodology to uncover public opinions on a socio-historical context, the Victorian era makes for a very suitable period for the application of this theoretical approach. Newspapers made up a large part of the Victorians’ daily routines (Franklin 41) and are thus a relevant source to elucidate these stances. For this reason, this dissertation will rely on extensive searches through the British Newspaper Archive’s online database for primary texts published in late-nineteenth-century Britain. Numerous searches have been conducted in order to gain a detailed insight in Victorian society’s attitudes towards the topics to be discussed in this thesis. Such thorough fieldwork has proven to be invaluable to uncover these attitudes, because these personal documents – including interrogations and letters to the editor – expose the actual Victorian thoughts and opinions.

In order to uncover the modern-day attitudes, online blogs will be used, as they are a useful source of modern public opinion. These ‘nonliterary texts’ will be used to examine the reception of the BBC series and societal stances in the twenty-first century. Moreover, to uncover the opinions of Sherlock’s writers and actors, interviews were conducted at
“Sherlocked: The Official Sherlock Convention”, which took place in London from April 24 to 26, 2015. At this convention, attendees were allowed to ask the writers and actors questions about the series. This dissertation uses the answers given to questions asked specifically for this thesis, as well as information provided in response to other attendees’ questions. These answers provided valuable insights in how Sherlock was crafted from the Victorian to the modern-day context, and how it came to serve the same function for today’s viewers as Doyle’s works did for Victorian readers. It is important to note that the medium has changed from the Victorian to the modern-day setting, as this could cause difficulties when taking into account the cinematographical aspect of the BBC series. However, as this thesis will be solely text-based – it deals with the characters, not with the way in which they are portrayed on the screen – the script alone will be used for the analysis of the characters under scrutiny.

This dissertation will trace the links between fiction and non-fiction in the Sherlock Holmes canon, and seek explanations for the choices made for the adaptation from reality to fiction. Moreover, it will do the same for the adaptation of the nineteenth-century crime stories to a TV series in the twenty-first century. As a methodology, it will incorporate analysis of main characters and social phenomena on the basis of Victorian newspapers, and interpret these in light of the perception of crime in the Victorian age for the Holmes original stories and at the time of production for the BBC series. In doing so, the objective of this thesis is to map out the perceptions of criminality in Victorian society and relate it to the modern-day equivalent. In order to give such a framework, three main elements of the Victorian criminal which have been highlighted before – class, race, and gender – will be examined. The dissertation will trace the real people or organisations that inspired the crime and examine how they have been fictionalised in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories. For class and profession, Doyle’s narrative under scrutiny is “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton”, which corresponds to the Sherlock episode “His Last Vow”.

Dassen |10
The second chapter will discuss crime in relation to race – terrorism in particular – in the first Holmes novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, and the BBC episode “A Study in Pink”. Lastly, the third chapter of this thesis will centre on gender and sexuality; it will investigate the female criminal by using illustrations of the Victorian short story “A Scandal in Bohemia” and the corresponding *Sherlock* episode “A Scandal in Belgravia”. In doing so, this dissertation will analyse the differences between real-life occurrences and Doyle's fiction by taking into account the Victorian British perception of criminals and crime, as well as the manner in which crime was portrayed in fiction and journalism of the time. Moreover, such analyses demonstrate that similar methodologies have been used to give an appropriate indication of the contemporary context in the adaptation to BBC’s *Sherlock*. As a result, it will be argued that the core shift of how criminality was defined in Victorian fiction versus today is the role of a criminal’s profession.
Chapter One: Class, Profession, and “Charles Augustus Milverton”

The first of the three elements that will be discussed in this thesis is class. As stated in the introduction, in Victorian England the relation between class and crime was quite clear: criminals were considered to be of a separate class, divergent from the normal class system. Although they were initially considered part of an underclass, as the Victorian age progressed, there was a shift in the nature of the criminal: upper and upper-middle class population became more interested in the practice of crime. The people in the higher classes had more power, and this power became their means of committing crime. Through analysis of a Holmes story and its adaptation in Sherlock, however, it appears that the definition of class has changed, and that over the course of the twentieth century, the distribution of power in criminal practice became increasingly connected to profession rather than the traditional notions of class.

When relating class to criminality, it appears that choices made when translating real cases into fiction can be accounted for when investigating the perception of the Victorian criminal in both reality and fiction. The writers of the BBC series have made similar choices for the modern-day setting, albeit adapted in accordance with the power distribution in the contemporary context. The main villain to serve as an example of the quintessential criminal for the Victorian Sherlock Holmes is Charles Augustus Milverton, the antagonist in the short story “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton” (in this thesis abbreviated as “Charles Augustus Milverton”), which was published in 1904. The modern-day adaptation of this character is Charles Augustus Magnussen, who features heavily in “His Last Vow”, the third episode of the third season of Sherlock, which aired on 12 January, 2014. In both the original story and the television series, this character is an excellent example to illustrate the shift in the perception of class in relation to power in Victorian England and the equivalence of this to
the modern-day period: Milverton, who was based on the real-life con artist Charles Augustus Howell, obtains his power through his reputation and position in society, whereas Magnussen gathers knowledge through his profession as a media magnate and the pay check that comes with the profession.

First and foremost, ‘Victorian literature is obsessed with class’ (Purchase 24), as class determined and structured an immense part of the Victorians’ lives. What exactly class is remains difficult to define; it was so interwoven in Victorian society that pinpointing a definition becomes near impossible. Ruth Livesey suggests six mutually inclusive possibilities: ‘class’ for the Victorians can entail ‘a series of preset social categories into which one is born; a process of collective identity formation of consciousness; something determined by how one makes a living; a state of mind shaped by intimate psychic experience; a rhetorical construct and set of social representations; or a matter of extreme material differences between poverty and wealth’. Although these suggestions are quite different individually, when combined they signal one identifiable feature: a division of society into a hierarchical system, wherein a member’s social and financial status correlates with their degree of power.

This relation between status and power was inherently connected to the three main strata in the British class system: upper, middle, and working class. The upper class consisted of the old nobility and gentry; the middle-class population was made up of industrialists and professionals (e.g. lawyers and doctors); the rest was categorised under working class, which covered more than half of the British population (Purchase 22). Although these were the three main classes that existed in Victorian England, there was another, non-traditional type of class in London, which received attention in the latter half of the nineteenth century: an underclass which consisted of criminals, prostitutes, homeless people, street Arabs, and others who were difficult to identify according to economic standards (Thomas 41). The discourse on crime in
relation to these lower classes was influenced especially by Thomas Mayhew’s 1851 publication *London Labour and the London Poor*, which has been mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis.

Class did not solely get attention in relation to crime, though, as class was increasingly on the British people’s minds. From the early 1800s onwards, the newspapers brought the matter of class to the attention of the public, specifically by delivering their commentary on class-related mistreatment (Knelman 29). From a theoretical perspective, Karl Marx defined historical materialism, which sought to explain the discrepancies in class and their relation to power. This theory added a socioeconomic perspective to the class discourse commented on by media. In their *Manifesto of the Communist Party* of 1847, Marx and Engels objected to the discrepancy between those who produced and those who owned the means of production and consequently profited (8). Marx believed that, since the workers create the goods, they should also be the ones to receive the profit, and as long as that was not the case there remained a flaw in the system (37). In formulating this theory, Marx also acknowledged the different strata in the class system (18), and that power and ideology are directly connected to the values of the owners of the means of production.

In contemporary society, the Marxist view on class has taken a different turn, as it developed into Neo-Marxism. Initially Marxism was a response to ownership of means of production in relation to those who gain financial benefit from the production, which was inherently related to class. Nowadays Neo-Marxist criticism has moved away from class struggle and refocused on the effects on capitalism on wealth distribution (Jackson 284). In other words, contemporary Marxist critics still focus on the financial side of means of production, but no longer do so in relation to class as defined by birth. Neo-Marxism scrutinises how power is distributed according to the means of production, which no longer is
necessarily linked to class, but rather to capitalism and the distribution of wealth, which appears to be linked to profession.

According to Runciman, this shift is due to the change in the stratification of classes in twenty-first century Britain. In 1990, Runciman surveyed the contemporary British class system and found out that it was made up out of seven strata at that time: ‘an upper class, three middle classes (lower, middle, and upper), two lower classes (skilled and unskilled) and an underclass’, which allow for mobility from one class to another (Runciman 378). It is true that the Victorian system knew a similar distribution, but the criteria now differ. Class strata are no longer defined by birth, but rather by a person’s ‘degree of economic power (or lack of it) attaching them through their relation to the institutional processes of production, distribution and exchange’ (377). This implies that the different strata are divided up according to economic power and the means of production, which relates to one’s professional position – or lack of it (Runciman 377).

In the Victorian Sherlock Holmes narratives, however, the notion of class as determined by birth is still very present. Victorian society was aware that major criminals were found in the upper class (Taylor 204) and ‘petty criminals’ were part of the underclass (Thomas 41). Accordingly, the majority of Holmes’s antagonists are from upper-class descent, especially when it comes to cases with much political or social weight: in “The Illustrious Client”, for instance, Holmes’s rival is a baron; “His Last Bow” antagonises German high officers and their involvement in the First World War; and in “Charles Augustus Milverton”, the subject of this chapter, an illustrious client is being blackmailed by Charles Augustus Milverton, the upper-class ‘king of all blackmailers’ (Doyle, Return 151).

Charles Augustus Milverton was based on an actual person, Charles Augustus Howell, a criminal who claimed to be from Portuguese aristocratic descent and was involved in scandals, fencing, and blackmail (Pennell 112). Nowadays, his background is still unknown,
though, as Howell kept his ‘birth and belongings [. . .] “wropt in myst’ry”. Few knew where he lived, but many had occasion to guess how’ (“London Letter” (1)). Victorian newspapers reported mainly on Howell’s social and criminal activity. After the publication of a volume of Howell’s letters in 1903, it became known that Howell acquainted ‘almost every remarkable man of his time’, who were all fascinated by him, yet ‘one who knew him in these connections described him as having gained the confidence of successive men of genius with no better purpose than to betray and rob them’ (“London Letter” (2)). Howell was nevertheless described as a cultured, ‘seductive Anglo-Portuguese gentleman [. . .] the most astonishing compound of charm and chicanery ever encountered in the flesh, or read of in fiction’ (“London Letter” (1)). Doyle followed this statement – he fictionalised him into the character Charles Augustus Milverton in a 1904 story, “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton”. Due to this mystery surrounding Howell, he served as an ideal template for Doyle’s narratives. As Milverton’s character was a real person translated into fiction, the alterations made from Howell to Milverton can be accounted for when considering the image of the Victorian criminal and the way it is portrayed in fiction.

Charles Augustus Howell claimed to be from Portuguese aristocratic descent, which he showed by wearing a red ribbon around his chest (Pennell 115). This signature feature in his appearance is telling of his status, as clothing ‘provided an index for the Victorians in which the identity of the wearer could be read’ (Purchase 27). Milverton’s clothing serves a similar function. When Holmes and Watson break into Milverton’s house to recover papers used for blackmail, he is wearing ‘a semi-military smoking-jacket, claret-coloured, with a black velvet collar’ (Doyle, Return 162). The price and quality of this fabric is indicative of a higher social stratum; additionally, the red jacket conveys a similar image to Howell’s red ribbon around his chest. Just as Howell indicated his status with this piece of fabric, it is
plausible Milverton wears his red jacket for the same reason, as well as to imply his connection to Howell.

Moreover, the way in which Holmes describes Milverton, veiled in simile, is particularly telling of Milverton’s class status. Victorians saw the class system as a hierarchy, and this hierarchy was also expressed as a hierarchy of species. Different types of animals, for instance, signified different positions on the social scale. When Holmes describes Milverton, he likens him to serpents, ‘slithery, gliding, venomous creatures, with their deadly eyes and wicked, flattened faces’ (Doyle, Return 150). In Victorian fiction, the upper class – those who hold the most power and are in the position to abuse it – have been described as ‘sly and treacherous like the snake’ (Pedrini and Pedrini 118). This, too, is indicative of Milverton’s class and the connotations that are considered inherent to it.

When it comes to their personality traits, there are differences to be found between the fictional and real offender. One of these relates to the trends of degeneracy in Victorian fiction (Marshall 113); in Doyle’s case, this degeneracy lies in an upper-class male character as a fatal moral flaw. Those who were unaware of Howell’s real dealings described him as ‘a man of unusual personal charm and business capacity’ (Pennell 112) and ‘a wonderful man [. . .] genius [and] splendidly flamboyant’ (Angeli 11). Yet, only when people were betrayed by him or knew about his true nature as a criminal, they described him as ‘a base, treacherous, unscrupulous and malignant fellow’, a ‘soldier of fortune’, ‘the vilest wretch [they] ever came across’, and ‘half mad [but] good natured’ (Angeli 11).

Likewise, for Milverton, Holmes refers to the fictional antagonist as ‘the worst man in London’ (Doyle, Return 151), and as Watson, Holmes’s companion and narrator of the majority of the Holmes stories, notes, there ‘was something of Mr Pickwick’s benevolence in his appearance, marred only by the insincerity of [his] fixed smile and by the hard glitter of those restless and penetrating eyes’ (Doyle, Return 152-3). His first impression, in other
words, is that of a charming man, yet he also shows those signs of degeneracy in his appearance – his smile and eyes – which are a signature feature of the Victorian characteristics in fictional characters. As this was not the case for Howell – his corrupted personality became known only after he betrayed people, not from first sight – this is one way in which the real-life antagonist is adapted according to the standards prescribed by fiction.

In addition, both Howell and Milverton were Victorian gentlemen in their demeanour, with which they obeyed the characteristics of the classic Victorian ‘privileged offender’. In a sense, privileged offenders were a cultural fiction, ‘the product of a wish fulfilment which had the useful effect of diverting attention away from genuine social problems of poverty, unemployment, and labor unrest’ (Joyce, “Sexual Politics” 507). Nevertheless, the privileged offender is grounded in reality; increasingly, major criminals in the late-Victorian period appeared to be upper and upper-middle-class businessmen, who invested in crime as if it were an ordinary business transaction (Taylor 204). They derived, moreover, either from the upper or the upper-middle class (Joyce, Capital Offenses 152). Allegedly, Howell was the same, as he was an aristocrat – or so he claimed – involved in the sale of stolen art, blackmail, and political and social scandals (Pennell 112). There is, however, a major difference in the degree of privilege with regard to his capital. Howell was ‘always impecunious, he borrowed all round’ (GJ “London Letter” (1)); he had no money, yet mysteriously he managed to afford an ‘en prince’ lifestyle. This is different for Milverton, who made it very clear that he had a fortune with which he could afford to acquire ‘letters which compromise people of wealth or position’ (Doyle, Return 151). Yet, they both have no other occupation: they are professional criminals and earn money through their dealings.

This brings to discussion the matter of profession. Howell was a professional criminal; he had no other profession that people knew of (Pennell 112). Both Howell and Milverton have turned extortion into their profession. With this, they add the upper-class air to their
occupation of criminality; not only are they of the higher classes themselves, extortion for money or favour also requires for the victims to be ‘of wealth or position’ (Doyle, Return 151). Howell and Milverton differ in the degree of activity in their crimes, though. Howell behaved like a businessman, as he dealt in stolen goods and was very active in acquiring influence on people surrounding him (Pennell 112). Milverton, in contrast, is a mere centre where information could be sold; ‘he allows it to be known that he is prepared to pay very high sums for letters which compromise people of wealth and position’ (Doyle, Return 151). This indicates that he is much less of an active agent than Howell was. Arguably this makes Milverton even more morally degenerate: rather than working for his money (which pickpockets and fences, for instance, did), he only reaps the profit of other people’s actions. This may be why Holmes shows great disdain for Milverton. Although Howell was often perceived as a respectable businessman, Holmes describes Milverton as quite the opposite: he is the epitome of the moral degenerate.

Milverton, the ‘king of all blackmailers’ (Doyle, Return 151), earns and sustains his fortune and power through extortion, which develops into a vicious circle of blackmail and ownership. He offers large sums of money for people who can provide him with compromising information – disgruntled servants may take Milverton’s offer and unveil their masters’ secrets for a considerable sum of money – which gives him more power and leverage to extort more money, and so on. This information puts Milverton in a position of great power, but he does not seem to care for power; he ‘methodically and at his leisure tortures the soul and wrings the nerves in order to add to his already swollen money-bags’ (Doyle, Return 151). His motive appears to be money for the sake of money, which can also be described as a type of degeneracy. The leverage he holds over people allow him to be beyond ‘the grasp of the law, [and] victims dare not hit back’ (Doyle, Return 151), enabling him to continue his
practice. Basically, his profession is extortion, and his reputation provides him with the knowledge and thus the power to exercise influence, if he so chooses.

In the twenty-first-century context, the BBC series has altered the viewpoint on Milverton’s character. The series is much less interested in the traditional class-related aspect, as Magnussen’s power relates to his actual profession. Unlike Milverton, Magnussen is not a professional criminal. He is a major newspaper owner, which puts him in the position to behave like a professional criminal and extort his victims. This choice was due to modern-day equivalence to Victorian context; Milverton was described as ‘the worst man in London, someone who gave you a shrinking sensation just when you looked into his eyes, and that said to [the writers] “newspaper owner”’ (Gatiss and Moffat). As Stephen Moffat said at the “Sherlocked” convention, Milverton was a modern character, ‘and there is someone doing what he did now, except on a larger scale – but you don’t know the scale nor the information. It is terrifying and sickening’ (Gatiss and Moffat). Mark Gatiss added that ‘in retrospect, Magnussen turned out to be an awful lot like [contemporary media magnate] Rupert Murdoch, but he was not consciously based on Murdoch’ (Gatiss and Moffat). It is, however, interesting to note that Magnussen’s non-fictional equivalent does actually exist, and that his presence actually causes such anxieties. This made Magnussen a successful modern-day villain to inspire terror in the audience.

In *Sherlock*, it appears that the fear is in the mystery with regard to the amount of power the criminals have, and not knowing how far this power reaches. In the series, Sherlock refers to Magnussen as the ‘Napoleon of blackmail’. This is a nod to the description of Milverton as ‘the king of all the blackmailers’ and the criminal mastermind Moriarty as the ‘Napoleon of crime’ in the original stories, which indicates the amount of power Magnussen has. As he is a major media owner, he can reach an immense audience with the information he spreads, and as such hold more effective influence over people.
The way in which the criminals retrieved their information played a role in typifying the moral degeneration of Milverton in the original stories, but Magnussen is more degenerate in the way he uses the information he receives. It is much less important how he comes by it. The crucial point is that he is able to spread any information as truth, without actually needing proof for it. In the television series it becomes clear that when something is in the papers, people assume it to be true. In Magnussen’s own words, ‘I’m in news, you moron. I don’t have to prove it; I just have to print it’ (“His Last Vow”). Moreover, ‘nobody knows where they retrieve their information, but they can spread anything, whether it be true or false’ (Gatiss and Moffat). A case in point in the episode is the conversation between the hospitalised Sherlock and his ex-fiancé Janine. As an act of revenge on Sherlock breaking off their engagement, Janine spreads lies about their life together as truth through several newspapers. In addition, in the finale of the second season, “The Reichenbach Fall”, Moriarty’s interview in the newspapers – effective because lies were embedded in truths – has a tremendous effect in that it led to Sherlock’s alleged suicide. In addition, messages on Twitter, frequently used as a fast news service, announced his resurrection in “The Empty Hearse”. This continuous emphasis on the importance of news stresses how crucial a wide and fast spread of information is to people’s fates in the twenty-first century. The effectivity of it is illustrated by the reputations and actions of Milverton and Magnussen. The former lives off his reputation; people fear him, but he never actually takes action. Magnussen, on the other hand, inspires fear by the fact that he does actually harm them.

Magnussen illustrates the power he holds over people in one of the final scenes of the episodes, where he asks John Watson, Sherlock’s companion and chronicler, if he can flick his face. If John declines, Magnussen would spread false information about his wife, which would ruin them both; all Magnussen has to do is print it. As he tells John, ‘I could [. . .] tear your whole life down, and I will, unless you let me flick your face. This is what I do to people
– this is what I do to whole countries – just because I know’ (“His Last Vow”). This fragment shows two important elements: it illustrates the importance of how widespread information is in modern-day context in contrast to the Victorian setting, but it also demonstrates the empowerment that knowledge gives. In the Victorian age, a reputation, for instance, was destroyed easily – a slip of paper that was remotely compromising could already be the cause for breaking off an engagement (Klinger 1013). It was enough to destroy a personal fate as a result of a grudge, as also seen in “A Scandal in Bohemia”. Nowadays, however, *Sherlock* illustrates that such leverage has to become available on a much larger scale in order to have an effect.

The second conclusion that can be drawn from the aforementioned fragment is that in the modern-day adaptation, the villain actually exercises his power. Where in the original narratives, Milverton only had his reputation and the physical evidence that kept people in his grasp, Magnussen actively uses the information as leverage for his own pleasure. He flicks people’s faces, licks their cheek, and eats their food off their plates all to indicate his ‘ownership’ (“His Last Vow”). Milverton only ‘tortures the soul and wrings the nerves’, inflicting psychological terror, whereas Magnussen exceeds it by inflicting physical measures to express his dominance.

All in all, this chapter leaves a couple of points for conclusion. Firstly, from the analyses above it appears that upper-class crime in the Holmes narratives can be typified mainly as cases of extortion. The upper classes as portrayed arrange crime and invest in it rather than actually committing it. Secondly, it appears that the translation of reality into fiction clearly follows the patterns that are set out both according to the trends of Victorian fiction and tailored to the perception of the criminal in a more general sense. Charles Augustus Howell was an isolated case, and Doyle shaped him according to societal standards of the privileged offender as known in Victorian England. In establishing links between
Howell and Milverton (through features such as his appearance and personality) yet making slight alterations (in motive, for instance), Doyle gives a clear image of the type of criminal the Victorians thought them to be.

In addition, for the Victorian Holmes narratives there seems to be fairly little emphasis on the class-related aspect of the criminal, yet it is present at all times – it is clearly embedded in the culture and as such does not need to be emphasised. This shows through the attitude towards Milverton, as well as the hints towards his background. When comparing Doyle’s story to *Sherlock*, Magnussen’s profession appears to be the source of his power, whereas for Milverton it was merely his class, money, and reputation. In the series, there needs to be a continuous emphasis as to how Magnussen is able to accomplish what he does, which is related to the money and knowledge, and thus power that he possesses.

This brings about a fourth point of conclusion, namely that class is no longer taken to be the most important feature to succeed as a top-of-the-line criminal; it is a prerequisite to also have the means to do something with the information gained from a certain professional position. Linking this to the Neo-Marxist point of view, Magnussen’s power is closely linked to his means of production: producing news. His profession as a media owner goes two ways. He owns multiple papers, TV stations, and web sites (“His Last Vow”). This means that he earns a fortune with which he can buy new information, but it also means that he is able to produce a lot of news and spread this information effectively and on an enormous scale. As demonstrated before, Milverton lived off of his reputation and money, which used to be tied closely to the benefits and power he gained from his class and social position. Magnussen, however, relies on his profession to grant him his power. This shows how the shift in the view on class is established in fiction as well.

For the Victorian period, the spread of information for effective results worked on a fairly small scale: if one person’s fate was to be affected, a relatively small group of people
had to be influenced. Now, however, it appears necessary to have a much larger target audience: in order to effectively ruin a reputation or spread news, whether it be true or false, as many people as possible have to have access to the compromising information. This leads to the conclusion that the concept of wealth in relation to power has shifted from being centred on money to being centred on opportunity through a criminal’s main profession – or means of production. Similar shifts have occurred when looking at the concept of race in the stories; rather than the traditional notion of race and nationality as related to crime, in the modern context it relates to opportunity by means of profession. This will be discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter Two: Race, Terrorism, and A Study in Scarlet

In many cases in the Holmes novels and narratives, as well as in other whodunits and crime stories, the culprits are easily identified. It seems to be straightforward who the murderer is in the first Holmes novel, A Study in Scarlet, and its corresponding BBC episode, “A Study in Pink”. Jefferson Hope – henceforth referred to as Hope – readily admits to his crimes in the novel, and in the episode, Jeff Hope – henceforth referred to as Jeff – does the same.

However, in both cases, the background of the crime is much more complex than that: in the novel, the real enemy is Drebber and Stangerson’s community in America, and in “A Study in Pink”, a man named Moriarty is the driving force behind the murders. This introduces a theme which is remarkably relevant to both the Victorian and the modern-day context: terrorism. In both the novel and the Sherlock episode, there is the idea of a ‘secret society’ of terrorists behind the murder, which appears to be connected to race. Race, here, is defined according to the broad terms set out in the Introduction. This chapter will mainly rely on A Study in Scarlet and “A Study in Pink”, but as terrorism is interwoven throughout the BBC series in general, other episodes will also be used as illustrations.

Before going into the actual organisations in relation to race and terrorism, it is important to distinguish the organisations in question. Although many secret societies are mentioned in the original Sherlock Holmes canon, there are two major identifiable groups – the Avenging Angels in A Study in Scarlet and the Ku Klux Klan in “The Five Orange Pips” – and one less prominent, yet relevant and crucial, party – Professor James Moriarty. Upon close inspection, these organisations (i.e. the ‘concept’ of Moriarty and the notion of a secret society in both the original Sherlock Holmes canon and the BBC adaptation) appear to be a reflection of their own contemporary terrorist institutions.
Rather than centring on the Ku Klux Klan, this chapter will focus on the Avenging Angels as an actual terrorist group, since they are a fictionalised version of an actual Mormon community, the Destroying Angels. Moreover, this group is more indicative of the British attitude towards race in relation to religion than a focus on the Ku Klux Klan would be. The Ku Klux Klan was ‘one of [America’s] first terrorist groups’ (*Ku Klux Klan* 7), but it was founded as a result of the abolition of slavery and targeted former slaves; today it is more notorious than it was in the nineteenth century, as a result of the revival which adopted an increasingly racial agenda, now being mainly associated with racial hatred (*Ku Klux Klan* 7; 45). Nevertheless, the strong anti-abolitionist focus was less relevant to the British public, and journalism indicates that the interest lay mainly on the mystery of the organisation (“Ku-Klux-Klan”).

Before going into analyses of the stories, it is useful to identify the terrorist organisations and trace them to their roots in reality. In *A Study in Scarlet*, the terrorist group dominating the novel is referred to as the Avenging Angels, which is the fictionalised version of the Destroying Angels. This group consisted of members of the Danite Mormon community which terrorised Utah during the nineteenth century. Initially, they are not on the foreground of the narrative; yet, although Hope was the murderer that led to Holmes’s involvement in the case, the novel really revolves around the Avenging Angels and their practice. In fact, such an introduction to the focus of crime is a trend in the Sherlock Holmes narratives: ‘the origin of the crime is a former crime that has gone unpunished’ (Fillingham 674), and it is the second crime – the one that attracted Holmes’s attention – that takes place in England, which serves as an entry point to the former crime.

The Avenging Angels serves as an excellent fictionalised group to establish contemporary British attitudes towards Mormonism and terrorism in general in the novel. Among others, the Destroying Angels was the nickname for some of the Danite Mormons in
Salt Lake City (“Interesting Meeting on Mormonism”). The group was comprised of every elder of the community, a Destroying Angel bound by an oath, and the members of the Mormon group were aware of the community members with this title. In 1860, there was a British meeting on Mormonism, where a former member of the Mormon colony spoke of the Destroying Angels:

There was no definite and fixed number of them; nor were they a body of men with a distinct organization. Every elder who received his “endowment,” took an oath to murder father, mother, sister, brother, wife, or child, if “the Church” required, or they opposed the progress of Mormonism; and although all the elders did not so murder their relatives, the oath constituted them “destroying angels.” (“Interesting Meeting on Mormonism”)

The speaker explains that they were not members of an organisation per se – a ‘Destroying Angel’ was merely a title which came with certain duties. In A Study in Scarlet, however, these people are turned into a terrorist secret society rather than a known number of elders of the community. The Avenging Angels is described as follows:

It appeared to be omniscient and omnipotent, and yet was neither seen nor heard. The man who held out against the church vanished away, and none knew whither he had gone or what had befallen him. His wife and children awaited him at home, but no father ever returned to tell them how he had fared at the hands of his secret judges. A rash word or a hasty act was followed by annihilation, and yet none knew what the nature might be of this terrible power which was suspended over them. No wonder that men went about in fear and trembling, and that even in the heart of the wilderness they dared not whisper the doubts which oppressed them. (Doyle 72)

It must be noted that, when he wrote the novel, Doyle had had no first-hand experiences with Mormonism, and many critics have noted that the situation he sketched was unrealistic.
In response to an angry letter in 1922, Doyle apologised for having written a ‘rather sensational and over-coloured picture of the Danite episodes’ (Cornwall and Arrington 163). Doyle admitted to sensationalising the Destroying Angels in fictionalising them untruthfully into the Avenging Angels. Although people may have recognised this as a flaw, for this thesis it is a valuable choice: it gives a telling insight in the Victorian mind set towards Mormonism and terrorism. The fictionalisation shows how newspaper articles – categorised under ‘minor documents’ in New Historicist methodology – can be equally valid to ‘suggest hidden links’ between one text or cultural value and the other, in this case fiction and reality (Gallagher and Greenblatt 10).

Though the reflection of the actual Danite Mormons may not be truthful, Mormonism as a religion is at the centre of the plot, and its depiction is telling of the British attitudes towards the American Mormons. In British Victorian newspapers, there was a dichotomous attitude in reports on Mormonism. These reports usually took the form of telegrams under a separate section of American news, and clearly distinguish a British ‘self’ and the American Mormons as being an ‘other’, viewed in terms of religion as a separate race. For instance, newspapers spread the idea that areas surrounding the Mormon community are afraid of the religion, publishing articles which claim that ‘considerable anxiety is reported to exist in the districts contiguous to Utah on account of the spread of Mormon colonies’ (“Mormonism”).

Moreover, the Mormons ‘[were] said to decoy large numbers of young persons annually from Great Britain to a life of immortality in Salt Lake City’, and it was feared ‘that it is not a matter with which [the British public] can interfere’ (“The Evening Post”). The Mormons were seen as a threatening force which snatched people from their own home and converted them. This image dominates A Study in Scarlet as well, as the community takes Lucy and Ferrier from the road. The elder says, ‘If we take you with us [...] it can only be as believers in our own creed’ (Doyle 64). Lucy and Ferrier are left either to die or to conform to
Mormonism, which is a rather definitive choice on Doyle’s part in accordance with the British attitudes towards this religious group as a forceful organisation.

Victorian papers furthermore sketch a negative image of polygamy in Mormon communities, which was regarded as one of ‘the furthest reaches of taboo exoticism’ (Fillingham 174). The majority of the reports on the Mormons deals with matters of polygamy. There were some positive or neutral missives on Mormons as well, but they consisted overwhelmingly of unfavourable pronouncements towards the polygamous practices. This is commented on in A Study in Scarlet: Lucy is captured and Ferrier murdered at the hands of the Avenging Angels, because Ferrier did not want Lucy to become one of many wives. To the British, polygamy was considered a serious crime, illustrated by reports claiming that Mormons ‘made strong but ineffective efforts to defeat the bill [against polygamy]’ (“The Mormons”). There were many more of these types of reports on the Mormons defying the government, with which they are implied to be criminals. As stated before, criminals were regarded as being of a different race (Taylor 49), and the way in which the Mormons are depicted and treated also contributes to the view that divergent religious practices are part of a racial ideology.

Not only are the Mormons a fruitful source to examine in relation to race, they are also highly relevant to investigate terrorism for both the Victorian novel and Sherlock in the twenty-first-century context. After the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11th, 2001, terrorism became a more prominent fear for modern-day society, which was covered widely by the media (Lutz and Lutz 22-23). However, terrorism is not a new phenomenon, and even before the events on 9/11, ‘there was clearly the perception [. . .] that the world was becoming a more dangerous place, a fact borne out by statistics on terrorism and its effects’ (Lutz and Lutz, Global Terrorism 20). Such attacks have the effect that it creates a clearer image of the terrorist in its contemporary context. After 9/11, ‘quite naturally the focus has
been on Al Qaeda and other Islamic terrorists’ (Lutz and Lutz, Terrorism XI); likewise, in the late-nineteenth century, an Irish American terrorist group lay at the basis of the Dynamite Wars (Short 1). Terrorism in both the Victorian era and the twenty-first century centre on clear racial issues: it focuses on Mormons and the Irish for the nineteenth century, and seemingly invisible terrorist organisations for the modern-day period.

It is imperative to define what exactly terrorism is before applying it in the analysis of the Sherlock Holmes stories and the BBC series. Any terrorist activity is ‘primarily undertaken for political [and/or ideological] reasons [and] involves violence or the threat of violence’ (Lutz and Lutz, Terrorism 3-4). However, not any action of violence or threat is necessarily an act of terrorism. For instance, to qualify as terrorism, the ‘violence must include a target audience beyond the immediate victims’ (4). In addition, ‘it has to be distinctly non-random in order to be successful’ (11-12). However, the appearance of randomness can make the terrorist actions even more effective, as another goal ‘is to create fear in the target audience’ (5), and when violence seems random, the idea that anyone may be the next target becomes a source of anxiety. Lastly, in order for ‘political violence to be terrorism there must be an identifiable organization’ behind it, which often carries an air of mystery as nobody really knows who participates in these organisations, even though the organisations themselves are frequently identifiable by name (5). In modern-day Britain, this often brings to mind groups such as al-Qaeda, Hezbollah, and the IRA; for nineteenth-century England, the terrorists were mainly of Irish or Irish American root.

In accordance with Lutz and Lutz’s definition, the Avenging Angels in A Study in Scarlet have political and ideological goals. These are fairly straightforward: the group ensures that nobody steps out of the moral and religious rules dictated by the Holy Four. If people did disobey, they vanished and were never seen again, and ‘a rash word or a hasty act was followed by annihilation’ at the hands of the group which ‘appeared to be omniscient and

Dassen |30
omnipotent, and yet was neither seen nor heard’ (Doyle, *Study 72*). Whereas some terrorism is supposed to appear random to the public (Lutz and Lutz, *Terrorism 11*), it is the way in which the Avenging Angels choose their targets that creates fear in and exercises power over the entire Mormon community (Doyle, *Study 72*). If a member goes against the Holy Four, they are annihilated. As this fear is spread across the entire community and keeps them in check, the Avenging Angels’ terrorism has ‘a target audience beyond the immediate victims’ (Lutz and Lutz, *Terrorism 4*).

In most of these terrorist characteristics, the Avenging Angels are similar to the Destroying Angels, the real-life group of Danite Mormons. For the Destroying Angels, however, there was no such ‘invisibility [and mystery] attached to it’ (Doyle, *Study 72*) and they were not a ‘secret organisation’, as it was clear to the Danites who exactly the Destroying Angels were: the elders of the community. Yet, the idea of a secret society is a recurring theme in the entire Holmes canon, most prominent as the Avenging Angels in *A Study in Scarlet*, the Scowrers in *The Valley of Fear*, and the Ku Klux Klan in “The Five Orange Pips”. In late nineteenth-century Britain, such conspiracies were to be found within the country as well. The mentioning of a ‘secret organisation’ here is notable, especially when regarding the double meaning of ‘Destroying Angel’. In the Victorian newspapers, the term ‘Destroying Angel’ was used to refer to one of the Danite Mormons mentioned in “Interesting Meeting on Mormonism” – the newspaper article cited above – but it also referred to another secret society.

Between 1880 and 1887, ‘three of Britain’s major cities came under attack from teams of bombers whose leadership, finance, and most of whose personnel came from Irish-American organisations based in the United States of America’ (Short 1). During this time period, newspaper headlines such as “Another Result of Irish Terrorism” and “Legislation by Terror” in relation to Ireland became more frequent, and people started to perceive that ‘the
source of disorder [was] Irish terrorism’ (“Oppression and Repression”). These terrorist actions consisted of bombings using dynamite and were also referred to as the ‘Dynamite Wars’. Interestingly, not only the Mormons are referred to as Destroying Angels; the Irish who were involved in the Dynamite Wars were given the same name as the Mormons mentioned before (“The Criminous Extremists”). This is another link between Doyle’s novel and the criminal context of the period in which *A Study in Scarlet* was written.

However, the Avenging Angels are not the only ones that hint at the presence of Irish criminals in the Holmes canon. Such targeted antagonism towards the Irish can be traced in several of Doyle’s Holmes stories, and though it might not be as obvious as the prominent secret societies, the idea of an Irish terrorist society is embodied in one character: Sherlock Holmes’s nemesis, Professor James Moriarty. The Irish were considered the villains of late-Victorian British society, as criminality was believed to be innate to them, and the British regarded the Irish ‘the harbingers of crime’ (Swift 399). Moreover, the Irish were also thought to conspire, which was confirmed by the threats people who voiced an opinion against the Irish received, signed by ‘Secret Society of the Irish Nation’. For example, in 1882 the following threat was published as “Secret Society of Ireland: A Glasgow Gentleman Threatened”:

‘Secret society of the Irish Nation, Glasgow, May 11. Mr. Sutherland,— It having come to our knowledge that you recently gave expression to a wish that the Irish nation were swept off the face of the earth, or words to that effect, and did at the same time denounce Irishmen, I hereby intimate you that your name and address, as well as this last language of yours, have been recorded in the register of our society. Take this warning from —RECORDER.’
These types of threats made the idea of Irish terrorists real and tangible to the public. They may have believed the Irish to be behind much of criminal activity, and this is where Sherlock Holmes’s nemesis Professor James Moriarty becomes relevant.

James Moriarty is probably based on the real American criminal mastermind Adam Worth, who lived from 1844 till 1902. Worth at one point ruled a ‘criminal network, radiating out of Paris and London and stretching from Jamaica to South Africa, from America to Turkey’ (Macintyre xii). Moriarty has a similar position, as he ‘pervades London, yet no-one has heard of him. . . . He is the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city’ (Doyle, *Adventures* 486-7). It is without doubt that Doyle knew about Adam Worth, as he was referred to as ‘the Napoleon of the criminal world’ (Macintyre 209), and this is the title assigned to Moriarty in “The Final Problem” (Doyle, *Adventures* 487).

Moreover, one of the paintings Worth stole and sold subsequently, *La Jeune Fille à l’Agneau*, is physically present in Professor Moriarty’s study (Doyle, *Valley* 12). There is a discrepancy with regard to the Professor’s character, though, as Adam Worth shunned violence (Macintyre 210), and Moriarty does not.

This discrepancy can be explained by recognising Moriarty as the embodiment of Irish crime, albeit established in an upper-class character, as the qualities of ‘the innate criminality of the Irish’ (Swift 399) apply to Moriarty. Other than a description of his crimes, Moriarty’s connection with the Irish is based on his name and the name of his comrade, Sebastian Moran. Both surnames are of clear Irish root (“Last Name: Moriarty”), which seems to hint at the two men’s origins. The two protagonists – Holmes and Watson – have typically English surnames, and this contrast with the villain’s last name also establishes clear links with the Irish nationality. This combined with the characteristics of his profession, placing him at the root of London crime, makes it plausible that Moriarty can indeed be regarded as the embodiment of Irish crime in Victorian London.
In relation to terrorism, the fact that Moriarty is just one man might seem in conflict with Lutz and Lutz’s definition of terrorist organisations. However, terrorists do not necessarily have to emerge as a group, as individuals can also be the organisers of terrorism. The key word here is ‘organisers’, as those who organise the actions do not necessarily have to be the agents of the attacks: organisers may provide ‘funding and technical support for a number of attacks when [they agree] with the goals’ (Lutz and Lutz, Terrorism 7). This is another element to terrorism that emerges in the Sherlock Holmes narratives. In Holmes’s description of Moriarty, Holmes says that if there were ‘a crime to be done [. . .] word is passed to the Professor, the matter is organized and carried out’ (Doyle, Adventures 487). Moriarty is, in other words, the person who enables people to commit the crimes, which attributes to him the characteristics of a terrorist organisation.

This also holds true for the BBC series, as Jim Moriarty is the identifiable organiser who provides a source of funding and support. In “A Study in Pink”, he rewards Jeff for every person he kills; General Shan of the Black Lotus gang acknowledges the danger of Sherlock’s knowledge of Jim Moriarty in “The Blind Banker” and is killed as a result; in “The Great Game”, Miss Wenceslas needed help to establish a fake Vermeer painting as a real one, and the ‘whispers’ that helped her went by the name of Moriarty; and so on. Moreover, only Sherlock Holmes knows about Jim Moriarty’s existence as the identifiable organiser of crime, which indicates that he is recognisable as a source of funding.

The matter of profession discussed in the first chapter of this thesis also holds true for Jim Moriarty in the BBC series, as he is businessman-like in his way of dealing with people who need help for certain crimes. In connection to the first chapter of this thesis, it is profession rather than class that enables Jim Moriarty to have the influence that he has over people. His identity is hidden from the detectives at Scotland Yard, but he is identifiable as an organisation by the people to whom he comes in aid. In “A Study in Pink” Jeff tells Sherlock
Moriarty’s name in his last outcry, which makes it clear that Moriarty enabled his murdering – he provided the pills, and for every life Jeff takes, a sum of Moriarty’s ‘money goes to [Jeff’s] kids’ (“A Study in Pink”). It is noteworthy that the agent for these acts of terrorism is a cabbie, which again illustrates how crucial one’s profession is for committing crimes effectively. In “A Study in Pink”, Jeff says that as a cabbie ‘it’s like you’re invisible. Just the back of a head’, and Sherlock adds that cabbies can go ‘unnoticed, wherever they go’. It is this very anonymity that his profession provides which makes him a successful criminal. Interestingly, such anonymity was also the success of the Avenging Angels in *A Study in Scarlet*; thus, in these cases, anonymity appears to be central to a successful execution of terrorist actions.

There are some clearer links to Jim Moriarty’s terrorist affiliations in the series, as many of the crimes he enables are terrorist actions. In “A Study in Pink” the London population is terrorised by spreading fear with regard to the ‘serial suicides’ by enabling Jeff to commit the murders; in “The Blind Banker”, Jim Moriarty enables the terrorist ‘Black Lotus’ gang; in “The Great Game”, he plants bombs on people which he blows up when Sherlock does not do as he says; and he informs the terrorist cells that the British and American governments know about a bomb planted on the airplane in “A Scandal in Belgravia”, which brings ruin to the British-American military mission. The organisations behind terrorist attacks do not always have to be the agents who execute the attacks, which is definitely the case in Jim Moriarty’s presence in the series.

Yet, while the terrorist organisations in the Victorian Holmes were centred on race – the Mormons and the Irish – for the modern-day update such elements are no longer incorporated, nor relevant. Although in the series Jim Moriarty is played by an Irish actor, the only reason for that was ‘because other adaptations hadn’t done it before, and we thought it would be funny’ (Gatiss and Scott). However, a contemporary anxiety with regard to
terrorism is that of Islamic terrorists (Lutz and Lutz, Terrorism XI). While Jim Moriarty himself may not have close ties with terrorism with regard to Islamic terrorists, this branch is hinted at in “A Scandal in Belgravia”. In the final scene, Irene Adler (the female villain in the episode) is seen in a burqa, kneeling in the sand, about to be beheaded. The first couple of seconds of this beheading scenario are filmed with a hand-held camera, the way in which recent Islamic terrorist actions appear on the internet. This makes it remarkably relevant for a modern-day context, as this is the way in which news of these beheadings become known through social media (Nanninga).

The final element to establishing an organisation that funds actions as terrorism is the goals they adhere to. In the series, Jim Moriarty has one main goal: playing games with Sherlock (Gatiss and Scott). He supports people if their plans ‘agreed with the goals’ (Lutz and Lutz, Terrorism 7), which makes him an organiser of terrorism. Sometimes it may seem as if he did not really have a clear goal and behaved generally apathetic towards crime, which becomes clear when Irene Adler says that ‘he just likes to cause trouble’ (“A Scandal in Belgravia”). This ties in with the anxieties in the twenty-first century: ‘in the suicide-terrorist age, we deal with terrorists who care less for themselves than for the “greater good”’, even if it is unclear what exactly that means (Gatiss and Moffat). In Sherlock, Jim Moriarty’s goal is unknown, which makes him even more horror-inspiring and effective, because he is unpredictable – anything may contribute to his goal.

In sum, terrorism is quite prominent in both Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories and BBC’s Sherlock. However, more than solely being terrorist agencies, these organisations also appear to be linked to the social context. The Danite Mormon community is another instance in which alterations that were made in fictionalising an actual group relate to the idea of the perceived nature of Victorian criminals as secret societies, as seen in the case of the Irish (Short 1). Such methodologies in fictionalisation do not just hold true for terrorist
groups, however, as the main antagonist of the Sherlock Holmes stories is based on a real-life criminal, the American criminal mastermind Adam Worth. Worth was used as a template – in the same way that Charles Augustus Howell was a template for Milverton – and was assigned characteristics from the people who were perceived to be the villains of Victorian society. These factions combined constitute the Irish Professor James Moriarty.

Doyle very clearly establishes these links with focal points in reality – for instance, the Destroying Angels and Mormonism in *A Study in Scarlet* – whereas *Sherlock* takes a broader approach to terrorist agencies. This is in accordance with the scale on which global terrorism occurs in the modern-day context. Jim Moriarty is the source behind most of the crimes committed in the series, but the actual source is generally unknown to the public. The criminal activity may appear to be random, but when knowing the unifying factor behind it, this seemingly random violence points in one direction: Jim Moriarty, whose goal is to make Sherlock ‘come out and play’ (“The Great Game”). Moreover, the links created between the anxieties with regard to the nature of terrorism, that of ‘secret societies’ in the original Sherlock Holmes narratives and hinting at the Islamic terrorists in the modern-day context, are also updated accordingly. These elements combined add up to effective terrorism relevant for the social contexts in which they were written.

In addition, although the first chapter of this thesis discussed class to be an important feature in depicting the criminal in the Victorian Holmes, in this case it is of much smaller importance. Rather, it is race which seems to be the main theme. Race, here, mainly indicates a non-traditional religion, one which harboured much hatred in British Victorian society: Mormonism, specifically the Danite Mormons. The attitude *A Study in Scarlet* takes towards the Mormons accurately reflects the attitude of the British. Although Doyle himself apologised for sketching a faulty image of the Danite episodes, the way in which the Mormon community is portrayed in *A Study in Scarlet* corresponds entirely with the views and
opinions printed in the newspapers of the time. In this way, it becomes clear that it is not so much actual reality of crime, but rather the public perception of a community which informs the work of fiction.

Lastly, when regarding the concept of race, it appears that there has been a shift in the idea of race and its relation to terrorism. For the Victorians, race was a broad concept which encompassed many elements that distinguished the British from other people. As described in the Holmes books, the British considered those with different ideologies in racial terms, and therefore portrayed them as menacing secret societies, American, or Irish. In the twenty-first century, nationality per se is no longer linked to criminality in official discourse. In the Victorian era, Doyle used racial stereotyping to set up his criminals. If similar stereotypical depiction of the criminal was done in Sherlock, however, it would probably cause social unrest, as censorship is a crucial factor of modern media. Making Moriarty black or Arabic as a terrorist would have been considered immoral. This can also be seen regarding gender issues in the modern day, as the way in which women are depicted in the media is a very sensitive issue (Pantozzi). In the BBC series, the classic Holmes character Irene Adler was a source of great debate on various forms of media. This outcry will be the focus of the next chapter, in which he role of gender and criminality will be investigated.
Chapter Three: Gender, Sexuality, and “A Scandal in Bohemia”

The image of the criminal in the nineteenth century was closely bound to gender ideologies, as Victorian homicide and assault were ‘largely associated with adolescent and adult men’ in criminal discourse (Taylor 47). Male criminals were not necessarily seen as deviant from social expectations, as Victorian conventions demanded that men should be physically strong and courageous, which made the line between criminal assault and masculine behaviour rather thin (Wiener 254). Women were likely to be physically inferior to men, which made them less prone to commit physical assault. They were normally seen as victims of crimes rather than offenders (Wiener X), which is emphasised by the upsurge in reports on domestic violence, specifically ‘wife murders’ (Knellman 30), publications on which became increasingly frequent in the latter half of the nineteenth century (“Your Results for ‘Wife Murder’”). Moreover, this line was much more clear-cut from a moral perspective as well, as ‘a natural religiosity and superior moral qualities’ were believed to be inherent to being female (Taylor 59). Consequently, if women engaged in crime, they would be entirely deviant from this gender stereotype. Of course, there were ways to commit homicide that did not require much physical effort, which were employed by women – poison, for instance, was regarded as a woman’s weapon (Porter 582) – but female criminality was rarely discussed, even though it existed.

This anonymity of female criminals is quite easily explained. As ‘homicide is regarded as a most serious offence, it is probably more often reported than other forms of crime’ (Emsley 40), and women were not significantly active in the homicide scene. However, lower-profile types of London crime were frequently committed by women. As stated before, rather than engaging in crimes that require physical strength, ‘women were more heavily involved in moral crimes, notably prostitution’ (Taylor 59). Prostitution was regarded a major
offence, as women in the Victorian age ‘were seen and judged in terms of a simple (and simplistic) Madonna/whore dichotomy and the most common accusation levelled at deviant or criminal women focused on their sexuality and their alleged uncontrolled sexual behaviour’ (Taylor 60).

In other words, the traditional stereotype of women was that they were supposed to be obedient, conforming, submissive, and sexually modest, and the women who deviated from that were regarded as offenders. Women were expected to be morally superior to men, and if they committed crimes such as prostitution, they became incompatible with the traditional feminine stereotype. In fact, Victorians held women’s moral superiority in so high a regard that ‘signs of a growing criminality of women [were] cited by many as evidence of modern moral decline’ (Wiener 245). The more female criminality was noted – even if this were just deviance from the female stereotype, a corruption of feminine ideals – the stronger the assumption grew that society was declining.

In the Sherlock Holmes narratives, the prominence of the traditional female stereotype becomes apparent: strong female characters are a rare find. Most of the women that feature in the stories are submissive, obedient, and entirely dependent on males in their lives. Yet, there is one specific powerful woman in the Sherlock Holmes canon: Irene Adler, who is Holmes’s opponent in the case presented in “A Scandal in Bohemia”. Adler is the only woman in the canon who actually defeats Holmes. She is an American singer, actress, and ‘adventuress’ (Doyle, Adventures 6) – the importance of her being American will be touched upon below – who was involved in a liaison with the King of Bohemia. Adler is likely to be based on the non-fictional ‘famous, and, for her sexual freedom, the infamous, French tragedienne, Rachel [Félix]’ (Frank 52). Félix was admired for her intelligence, work ethic, diction, and ability to act. These traits are also assigned to Irene Adler, even though it remains unclear what exactly she does during the day. Be that as it may, Adler is disciplined, which can be seen as a variant
of a work ethic: she ‘lives quietly, sings at concerts, drives out at five every day, and returns at seven sharp for dinner. Seldom goes out at other times, except when she sings’ (Doyle, *Adventures 14*).

Upon close inspection, Adler appears to be deviant in the way the Victorian female criminals were: she embodies a corruption of the ideals of womanhood. In Doyle’s story, Adler keeps a compromising photograph as leverage over the King of Bohemia. She threatens to use the photograph to ruin the King’s pending marriage out of revenge for his leaving her. The King employs Holmes to retrieve the photograph, to ensure his security from Adler’s vindictiveness. Adler, however, changes her mind about using the photograph when she falls in love with Godfrey Norton and marries him. When Holmes executes an elaborate plan to retrieve the photograph, he finds himself outwitted by Adler, who escaped with the photograph and leaves a note for Holmes. Through her scheme she obtained Holmes’s respect: to him, ‘she is always the woman’ (Doyle, *Adventures 3*).

Like the majority of the women in the canon, Irene Adler is very beautiful; she is described as ‘the daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet’ (Doyle, *Adventures 14*). Adler’s description as a ‘thing’ indicates that she is objectified, which also illustrates a superior stance on the men’s side. Moreover, ‘dainty’ is a stereotypical adjective which indicates attractiveness and frailty of women. However, in Adler’s case her daintiness is also her strength: it was because of her beauty that she became involved with the King of Bohemia in the first place, which put her in her position of power: her beauty empowers her. Her profession as an actress may have enabled her to get to know the king, as the Victorian actress found ‘herself gradually in the midst of a literary and artistic circle…where she [met], and perhaps [talked] to, the cleverest men and woman of the day’ (Davis 85).

Adler’s motivations for potentially bringing the King to ruin are similar to that of many women in the canon, as she would use the picture for the sole purpose of revenge.
Passion is the drive behind her decisions. Holmes recognises love to be Adler’s drive behind her actions when he says, ‘If the lady loves her husband, she does not love your Majesty. If she does not love your Majesty, there is no reason why she should interfere with your Majesty’s plan’ (Doyle, Adventures 23). Thus, although Adler is a strong female character, her emotions are the drive behind her actions. This is in line with the contemporary conception of female nature, as Victorian women were ‘[t]rained to be loving and emotional’ (Vicinus xi).

As stated before, Victorian women were expected to remain within the domestic sphere; Adler also embraces the notion of this expectation in the way in which she makes her escape by marrying Norton. Adler and her husband ‘both thought the best resource was flight, when pursued by so formidable an antagonist’ as the King of Bohemia (Doyle, Adventures 24). Her hurried marriage to Godfrey Norton and subsequent fleeing is her only means of escaping Holmes. In marrying Norton, Adler returns to the Victorian conventions for women. Before Adler’s escape, when her reasons were unknown and her behaviour not according to normative Victorian gender ideologies, the King of Bohemia became restless and paranoid, but when she returns to adhering to the Victorian traditions, he trusts her to be honest again. He says that after she married, he knew ‘that her word [was] inviolate. The photograph [was] as safe as if it were in the fire’ (Doyle, Adventures 24). Women were expected to be truthful when they conformed to Victorian norms, and her conformity is also signalled by her turning to domesticity in married life. In other words, once Adler returns to conformity, she is no longer a threat.

Nevertheless, even though Adler is given some of the traits of the classic obedient Victorian woman, she is not actually seen as inferior to the male characters. Irene Adler is a very intelligent woman in the story, which firstly becomes apparent from Holmes’s attitude towards her. Adler is the only woman in the canon whose intellect is not patronised: to
Holmes, ‘she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex’ (Doyle, *Adventures 3*). Unlike the other women that feature in the canon, she never comes across as frightened or weak, nor does she exhibit any behaviour that might indicate submissiveness on her part. It is very clear that she is in control rather than passive, as the King describes her as having ‘a soul of steel, [...] the face of the most beautiful of women, and the mind of the most resolute of men’ (Doyle, *Adventures 11*). Moreover, Victorian actresses were ‘criticized for doing exactly what men did: turning outside the home for social intercourse, intellectual stimulation, and occupational fulfillment’ (Davis 86). Such rationality and strength of mind was considered unladylike, and her masculinity associates Adler with the deviant qualities of the female criminal.

In addition, her intelligence thrives when she defeats Holmes – she had caught on to his plan when he came to visit her house dressed up as a clergyman – but her intelligence is not the only masculine element to her victory. Adler, having been warned about Holmes, disguises herself as a man and follows him home. Commenting on her cross-dressing, she says that because she was an actress, ‘[m]ale costume [was] nothing new’ to her; she ‘often [took] advantage of the freedom which it gives’ (Doyle, *Adventures 24*). Very crucial to this statement is the notion that clothing allows for a certain exploiting of masculinity (Kestner 77), as it offers a ‘freedom from the social construction of gender’ (Frank 54). Moreover, clothing was invaluable as it ‘provided an index for the Victorians in which the identity of the wearer could be read’ (Purchase 27). When disguised as a man, Adler disregarded her femaleness and would have been treated as a man. Cross-dressing, however, is yet another way of abandoning the traditionally feminine traits of daintiness and conformity; this abandonment can be seen as moral corruption, and as such can be linked to the perception of female criminals.
Adler’s criminal nature is also emphasised by her sexual behaviour. Irene Adler is the only woman in the Victorian Holmes canon who independently succeeds in freeing herself from Holmes’s patronising behaviour or punishment. This can be explained by the fact that she is described as an adventuress: she was involved in a liaison with the King of Bohemia and blackmailed him. In this context, ‘adventuress’ is considered ‘a suggestive euphemism, [with which] she incarnates all that can be seen as monstrous in any woman who defies convention’ (Frank 15). She actually adheres to the characteristics of the Victorian perceptions of the female criminal, suggested to be criminal by engaging in ‘alleged uncontrolled sexual behaviour’ (Taylor 60).

It must be noted that Adler is also a crucial character to discuss in relation to the racial element stipulated in the previous chapter: as Adler is American, her nationality can explain and excuse her deviance. As stated in Chapter Two, the view on the Mormon community in America was very much portrayed as a British ‘self’ and American ‘other’; similarly, Irene Adler’s deviation can be regarded as such. Not only is she from a different gender, she is also American, which may explain why Holmes does not understand her and why he was ‘beaten by a woman’s wit’ (Doyle, Adventures 25). If the British related Irishness to criminality, being American was clearly related to otherness, incomprehension, and moral laxity. This relates to the view of the Avenging Angels as a source of horror. Furthermore, Irene Adler is American, and she is difficult for Holmes to decipher – the culture is significantly different. Doyle made a clear conscious decision to make her devious, intelligent, beautiful, and masculine through her cross-dressing. In addition, Doyle admitted to not knowing much about America, and he drew his views from contemporary British perception and what he read in the papers (Cornwall and Arrington 161). In short, in Doyle’s fiction, there is allure but also a disdain for the Americans: they are deviant, but very interesting to read about.
While these values were valid for the Victorian context, they generally no longer hold true for the twenty-first century. Yet, “A Scandal in Belgravia”, the Sherlock episode based on the original “A Scandal in Bohemia”, takes a similar approach to Irene Adler as Doyle did, as both women can be classified as ‘adventuresses’. Their characterisation notwithstanding, the response to the characters shows the way in which social contexts with regard to women and sexuality have changed. In the Victorian era, women were expected to be modest, sexually reserved, and obedient to men. In Sherlock, the modern-day Irene Adler is the complete opposite. Like Doyle’s Adler, she finds her strength in her femininity, but she makes it her profession: she is a dominatrix, and per definition asserts her dominance over her clients.

It must be noted that Sherlock’s Irene Adler has received much criticism from Sherlock fans and critics, which can largely be found on online blogs. Stephanie Cole summarises the public criticism on Irene’s character in comparison with the Victorian narrative. She criticises Sherlock’s writers for the choice that Irene ‘had to be sexier, more emotional, and she had to lose’ (Cole). While for the larger story this may seem true, a more thorough examination shows that Irene is in fact a strong female character, heightening the Victorian Adler’s strengths and updating them in line with a third-wave feminist approach to the character, and that – in the larger scheme – Irene did not lose at all. Cole’s criticisms measure her character only on the basis of her dynamic with male leads, but Irene Adler is more than that, since she has a life aside her interactions with Sherlock. A more appropriate critical reading entails looking at her character in isolation from Sherlock, as the episode depicts a single encounter with the protagonist of the series, and can therefore not be seen as representative for each of her dealings.

In the series, Irene draws her strength from her femininity, which becomes clear from her profession, but has been subject to criticism. Her being a dominatrix is, however, likely a result of the awareness that the several feminist movements have raised. Whereas followers of
earlier strands of feminism were against satisfying the patriarchy by means of women’s
clothing, some strands of third-wave feminism argue the opposite: women should be free to
dress however they want to dress, and they pose ‘expressions of femininity and female
sexuality as a challenge to objectification’ (Newman and White 246). This is exactly what
Sherlock’s Irene Adler embodies. She is the prime example of the strong female figure that
third-wave feminists argue for: attractive, intelligent, sophisticated, and independent.

The series has embraced the notion of prominent female sexuality and made it into
Irene Adler’s trade mark: she is a dominatrix. Rather than maintaining Adler’s identity as an
ex-actress and adventuress who uses her daintiness to extort favour on one occasion, the series
has foregrounded her sexuality by making it into her profession as a dominatrix which allows
her to extort on multiple occasions. Although this alleged ‘sexualisation’ has been subject to
criticism and has been referred to as objectification (Cole), modern-day Irene actually
challenges it. The Victorian Adler’s two main characteristics were delicate beauty and
intellect, and she was objectified as the ‘daintiest thing’. The modernised depiction of Adler,
however, is a third-wave feminist approach in that it goes against objectification: Irene as a
dominatrix has taken full control of her sexuality and transformed it into a weapon-like
existence that she uses to overpower those around her. In short, her job as dominatrix is not
imposed on her, but is a conscious result of her personal empowerment.

The sheer fact that she uses her sexuality in this way is no longer considered a crime in
modern-day British society. Granted, the dominatrix is ‘taboo and . . . perceived with an
unsteady mixture of repulsion, disinterest, concern, amusement, and fascination’ (Lindemann
9). Those ideas notwithstanding, Sherlock turned Irene Adler into an admirable and
respectable woman, highly intelligent, sophisticated, and capable of defeating Sherlock. Even
though the practices of the Victorian and modern-day Adler are somewhat similar, the way in
which the women are portrayed shows a clear change in attitude towards the idea of strong
female characters who use their sexuality as an asset. Being a dominatrix, she assumes a dominant position over her clients per definition in sexual power play.

This empowerment already becomes clear from Adler’s first interaction with Sherlock. When Sherlock visits her in her home, Irene wears her ‘battle dress’ (“A Scandal in Belgravia”): nothing but her high heels and make up. It is noteworthy that this attire is referred to as ‘battle dress’, as referring to it in military terms emphasises the strength that Irene draws from her femininity: she uses it strategically. This appears to work, as both Sherlock and his companion John Watson are speechless and thrown off guard upon seeing her, and her presence is seared into their minds. This is what ultimately guarantees her survival, because Sherlock never forgot about her and rescued her from being executed.

Cole’s criticism that Irene ‘had to lose’ relates to the information that she stores on her phone: Sherlock deduces what Irene’s phone’s passcode is – I AM SHERLOCKED – which gives away that Irene was in fact in love with Sherlock, and that sentiment ended up to be the destruction of her work (“A Scandal in Belgravia”). However, upon closer scrutiny, Irene appears to have played a different game, using her femininity and sexuality to ensure her survival. This relates to the final scene of the episode, in which Irene is about to be beheaded, but Sherlock prevents her decapitation. Though the contents of her phone and her willingness to protect them seems to be at the heart of the episode, Irene’s actual main goal is to get into Sherlock’s head. This shows from the very beginning and is demonstrated by the clues that hint at it throughout the entire episode. She was interesting to Sherlock because of her intelligence and the consequent mind games they play – and, on top of that, she ‘flirted with Sherlock Holmes’ (“A Scandal in Belgravia”). Irene enabled Sherlock to break into her phone, as the hints to her being in love with him lead to him discovering her passcode. She wanted Sherlock to find the information, and by making such an impression into his mind – she even enters his memory palace in “The Sign of Three” in the third season – she
manipulated him into saving her from her execution: Irene remained on his mind to the extent that he followed her whereabouts, and found out where and when she would be executed. In using her sexuality as a weapon, she played the winning strategy in both extracting information from clients and by having Sherlock prevent her execution.

With the information she extracts, Irene raises her dominance to a higher level, as the valuable and compromising information endangers lives, reputations, and international governmental plots. Interestingly, as also seen in the cases of Magnussen and Moriarty, it is her profession which enables Irene to collect information she can use ‘to extort either money or favour’ (“A Scandal in Belgravia”). She is indeed a criminal who admits that she ‘misbehave[s]’ (“A Scandal in Belgravia”), which also seems to be a euphemistic gesture towards the Victorian standards of female sexual behaviour. In other words, for the modern-day context, the focus is not so much on her being sexual and attractive, but rather on the benefits she reaps through the professional side of being a dominatrix. It moreover shows the shift from the desired domesticity of the Victorian woman to the independence and capability as a working woman in the modern-day version. Her attractiveness is taken for granted as it is implied in her profession, in a similar way the class-related element remains unsaid when discussing Magnussen in the first chapter of this thesis. Whereas the Victorian story completely left out Adler’s daily activities or the importance of her profession as a singer, and only mentioned that she was out during the day, the BBC series focuses on the professional element of Irene and on the benefits which come with it. In this sense, profession is highlighted as the most important element to the distribution of power and knowledge, as it was with Magnussen, Jim Moriarty, and Jeff Hope.

This adds to another point in the modern Irene Adler’s independence. Victorian Adler was able to keep her incriminating evidence against the King of Bohemia safe by herself; similarly, the modern equivalent also has all of her information in one place which she
safeguards. However, the main difference is the abundance of material the two women have: Doyle’s Adler had only the photograph in her safe, which she meant to use for personal revenge, whereas Sherlock’s Irene has a whole array of information on her camera phone. Irene tells Mycroft Holmes, Sherlock’s brother who holds a position in the government, that on her phone she has ‘got secrets, pictures, and scandals that could topple [his] whole world’ (“A Scandal in Belgravia”). There is no direct link between the intelligence she gathers and what she can do with it, because she is unable to do anything with it herself – she even admits that much of it she does not understand. This gives rise to another point of criticism, as she is not exactly independent (Cole).

Such perceived dependence, too, is explained by contemporary cultural context: it is due to the scale on which crime occurs in the twenty-first century. Undoubtedly, Victorian society dealt with large-scale crime as well, but present-day media appears to be more interested in public affairs (McCombs 6), and Sherlock follows this example. In the series, this can be illustrated by the use of the media, as indicated in the first chapter of this dissertation, the presence of the British secret service, the governmental position which Mycroft occupies, and the political influence the villains of the series have. Moreover, as already indicated in the previous chapter, there seems to be an interest in terrorism and ‘secret societies’ behind crimes: “A Scandal in Belgravia” also features one of these conspiracies, as there lies an international governmental terrorist pact at the centre of the episode.

Irene is not necessarily dependent on men as a rule, but rather on Jim Moriarty to make her information useful. It is, however, less related to her being female and more to the severity and effects of the contents of her phone (Gatiss and Moffat). The line of ‘code’ that Sherlock deciphers in the episode, for instance, is crucial information that dissolves a terrorist pact between the British and the American government. It requires Moriarty, criminal mastermind, to make this information useful. The important element here is that ultimately
Irene has control of the information, she gathers it herself, and she chooses the people to share it with.

In conclusion, it has become evident that Irene Adler has been updated in several ways to fit a modern-day context. In the original story, she was admired for her masculine mental strength and was able to find out about Holmes by disguising herself as a man, which assigns to her some of the qualities of Victorian female criminals, by adopting masculine character traits and abandoning the feminine ones in cross-dressing. *Sherlock*, on the other hand, takes a different approach. Adler is empowered by her femininity and sexuality – she *undresses* rather than *cross-dresses* – but her intellect and strong-willed nature are not regarded as masculine. As she says herself, ‘brainy is the new sexy’ (“A Scandal in Belgravia”), and intelligence and strength of mind are not necessarily linked to gender ideologies.

Moreover, where the Victorians demanded of women to be sexually modest, and regarded prominent sexuality as a serious offence (Adler is only referred to as ‘dainty’, after all), in *Sherlock* has turned sexual attraction into Irene Adler’s strength by turning it into her profession. This enables her to retrieve the information she needs to remain overpowering. The series does not express an attitude towards the profession as a dominatrix, and although it shocks John Watson, Irene is not ostracised for her behaviour. This indicates a clear shift in the perceptions of what female criminality means and the ideals for women between the Victorian and modern-day context.
Conclusion

The previous chapters have provided an overview of the way in which Victorian society viewed the criminal according to the three pointers which structured the power relations: class, race, and gender. These factors play important roles in both Doyle’s original Holmes canon and *Sherlock*, but the differences between the Victorian and the modern context point at some possible shifts in the social contexts and exact definitions. Through close readings of three major Holmes texts and their subsequent adaptations for the BBC series, this thesis has argued that the differences between real-life Victorian criminals and their fictionalisation into the Holmes canon, as well as the alterations from the Victorian to the modern-day Holmes, can be explained by taking into account the contemporary criminal contexts as indicated by substantial searches through Victorian newspaper databases and modern-day media.

Firstly, it appears that in the works of fiction used for this dissertation, there is a close link between terrorism and the idea of a secret society. In the Victorian context, terrorism appeared to have a clear focus on racial connotations, as the terrorist organisations were either based on a cultural or religious agenda (the Mormons), or were of a different race according to Victorian standards (the Irish). Although terrorism and religion are still closely linked in *Sherlock*, secret societies no longer solely apply to racial matters: secretive abuses of governmental power appear to play a larger role in the BBC series. This implies that the modern-day context shows a stronger focus on fear orchestrated and influenced by the government, whereas the Victorian Holmes canon did not necessarily connect these terrorist organisations to governmental practice. *Sherlock* appears to be cautious in connecting it closely to race, and follows the trend of media interest in public affairs.

Additionally, for the Victorian era in particular, the racial element is highlighted when looking at some of the criminals: it appears that American criminals are of immense interest
to the Victorian Holmes stories. For the modern-day context, America no longer plays such a role, as nationality is not necessarily a point of interest to the series, but for the Victorian narratives the relation between criminality and Americans is clear. The Mormons in *A Study in Scarlet* were not only divergent for their religion, they were also Americans. In addition, Professor James Moriarty was based on an American criminal mastermind, Adam Worth, and Irene Adler is an American adventuress, and thus divergent. Though this thesis has only discussed three narratives in detail, similar American antagonism can be seen in, for instance, *The Valley of Fear* and “The Five Orange Pips”. In the Sherlock Holmes stories, American criminals and criminal organisations appear to be a recurring theme, but outspoken opinions on Americans can also be found in a considerable number of Victorian newspaper articles. The relation between crime and America could prove interesting for further studies into the Holmes canon, especially when relating them to the Victorian British attitudes towards Americans.

Thirdly, a major element which makes the stories so successful from a socio-analytical point of view is the way in which real cases and real criminals have been translated into fiction. Through four case studies of the transformation of real-life Victorians into Doyle’s fictional characters – Charles Augustus Howell into Charles Augustus Milverton, the Destroying Angels into the Avenging Angels, Adam Worth into Professor James Moriarty, and Rachel Félix into Irene Adler – this dissertation has demonstrated that the writer relied on the way in which crime and criminals were perceived in his time to adapt these villains to fit the Sherlock Holmes narratives. The attitudes expressed in the Victorian British newspapers and crime statistics available from the times give an insight in the British class, race, and gender bias, and can be traced in the Holmes narratives. The best example here is *A Study in Scarlet*, as Doyle admitted to writing a false account of the Danite Mormon community: the knowledge he had of this group came only from the papers and from hearsay, which reflected
the attitudes of the Victorian British towards this topic. Such alterations from reality into fiction showcase the ‘touch of the real’ and illustrate how the Victorian zeitgeist reflects in the Sherlock Holmes stories.

Finally, the main trend that becomes apparent when examining crime in relation to class, race, and gender is the increasing importance of occupation. In a way, this can all be linked to the modern-day redefinition of class as linked to monetary and professional standards. For the Victorian period, the Holmes villains’ main profession was criminality, whereas in the modern-day context, a person’s position in the criminal underworld is defined by criminal aspects related to their occupation, not by their occupation in itself. For example, while Milverton was a full-time blackmailer who lived off his reputation as being upper-class, Magnussen gains information and spreads it through the media corporation he owns: the power which he possesses over people is inherently linked to his means of production, his profession as a media magnate. In addition, the racial issue is highlighted in the retired Irish Professor James Moriarty, who occupied himself as ‘the controlling brain of the underworld’ (Doyle, Valley 5). Since this was his only profession, he was able to build up such a vast network of agents and contacts, and in doing so embodies the perception of Irish crime in London. Sherlock’s Jim Moriarty – who is nicknamed ‘consulting criminal’ – also is an organiser of crime, but it is not his race which assigns to him certain characteristics: he is a businessman in his dealings, which makes his influence over people inherently linked to his profession. Furthermore, even the relation between gender and criminality appears to be related to profession. The Victorian Irene Adler used to be an actress, which allowed her into the higher social circles and made her perceived as deviant from feminine ideals. However, at the time of the story her daily activities are unknown, and all the while she holds leverage over the king. For the Victorian Adler profession did not play a role, but for the modern-day reimagining of Irene, her profession is key to her success as a criminal: empowerment and
data-collection is a result of the descriptors that accompany being a dominatrix. All in all, in moving from the Victorian to the modern-day context, profession has become a major tool in obtaining and sustaining power in criminal activity, and Doyle’s stories serve as excellent studies in crime to investigate these contexts.
WORKS CITED


Chandler, Elizabeth. Personal interview. 2 Mar. 2015.


Kestner, Joseph A. Sherlock's Men: Masculinity, Conan Doyle, and Cultural History.


“Last Name: Moriarty.” The Internet Surname Database. 7 Sept. 2013. Web. 1 Apr. 2015.


Lindemann, Danielle J. Dominatrix: Gender, Eroticism, and Control in the Dungeon.


Nanninga, Pieter. Personal interview. 30 Mar. 2015.


*British Newspaper Archive.* Web. 5 Feb. 2015.

Thomas, Donald, and Henry Mayhew. *The Victorian Underworld.* New York: New York UP,

Tyler, Imogen. “‘Chav Mum Chav Scum’: Class Disgust in Contemporary Britain.” *Feminist

Vicinus, Martha. *Suffer and Be Still (Routledge Revivals) Women in the Victorian Age.*

Feb. 2015.

Wiener, Martin J. *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law, and Policy in England, 1830-

“Your Results for ‘Wife Murder’.” *British Newspaper Archive.* Web. 2 Mar. 2015.