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Simona Catrinel Avarvarei

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Magni Nominis umbra: “the shadow of a great name”, line taken from the epic poem *Bellum Civile* (1. 135) by the Roman poet Lucan, 39-65 A.D.

In pride of wit when high desire of fame
Gave life and courage to my labouring pen,
And first the sound and virtue of my name
Won grace and credit in the ears of men;
With those the throngèd theatres that press
I in the circuit for the laurel strove,
Where the full praise, I freely must confess,
In heat of blood a modest mind might move; /
With shouts and claps at every little pause
When the proud round on every side hath rung,
Sadly I sit, unmoved with the applause,
As though to me it nothing did belong. / No
public glory vainly I pursue;
All that I seek is to eternize you (Drayton “To the
Reader of these Sonnets”, XLVII, *Idea* in Arundell
Esdaile 1908: 114; *emphasis added*)

- 1 So wrote the Elizabethan poet Michael Drayton, in his sonnet XLVII, at a time when the audience’s involvement with the stage, the dramatic material, and the actors’

performance—either through explosive applause or rambunctious interruptions—charted not only the (un)popularity of the acting company and playwright, but also the almost organic relationship between the work of fiction, its figments, and the public. This article hooks centuries together through a canonical (re)interpretation of the *I* and *you* the Renaissance poet weaves into his lyric, as mere extensions of the complex relationship between the creator and the created self; and just as in the Elizabethan age, the audience is the witness to this enduring bond, drawing a larger architecture for the construct, no longer binomial, but three-sided. This article focuses on the triad author (Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle), character (Sherlock Holmes) and receptor-audience and on their unique journey from the pages of Victorian fiction to what might be referred to as a form of modern “institutionalized religion” (Poore 59).

- 2 In his *Philosophy of Literature. An Introduction*, Christopher New, toiling with elements of logic and philosophy of language, attempts to capture the very essence of the aesthetic artefact, too complex to fit within the canonical corset of any definition imaginable, acknowledged as it is for its play of substitutes and allusive transfer of meanings. It is “literalness” which not only fosters a secondary significance of the linguistic construct, but also allows narration to communicate at a subliminal level. Thus, through textual mediation, both author and reader escape from (self-)enclosure into a metamorphosized poetics, jointly invented and accepted, though not always fictionalised. Through *antonomasia*, the psychological typology all fictional characters came to encapsulate has distilled the memory of the referent, offering us the possibility to become personally acquainted with our own *Shylocks* (which, though offensive, as the OED warns us, refers to any moneylender who charges extremely high rates of interest), or *Scrooges*, pathetic curmudgeons who are mean with money, or *Harpagons*, a common noun which has been used by the French to refer to “hommes d’une grande avarice” (extremely avaricious men) since 1813, and whose translation in English (*Scrooge*) does nothing else but close the circle from “peer to peer”. Furthermore, from the name of Molière’s character, the French language, through a synecdoche-inspired projection, developed the term *harpagonnerie* (avariciousness) to sanction rapacity and inhumanity.
- 3 The *corporeality* of fiction lends itself to the plane of psychological reactions wherein it awakens the unique faculty of imagination. In the fourth chapter of his study, “Psychological Reactions to Fiction”, Christopher New starts by asserting: “Works of fiction affect us profoundly. We are moved, amused and even frightened when we read, watch or contemplate them. Usually, our emotions are *for* the characters we encounter in the works” (New 53). There is no doubt, however, that these emotions of ours sketch the imaginarily mediated reality of fiction, “[o]ur reactions to fictional characters and events, do seem, after all, to be real, not make-believe, reactions [...]” (63), in a symbolic and substantial gesture of transcendence (Bataille). This psychological perspective was to be analysed by Roland Barthes in his landmark essay “La mort de l’auteur” (“The death of the author”) in terms of *sui generis* communication between the artistic artefact *per se* and its own *homo interpretant*, “free” from the auctorial authority of *homo symbolicum*. It is as if mythology (re)wrote itself, only this time the prophecy is fulfilled and Chronos is “swollen” and overthrown by his heirs, in a symbolic act of annihilation of the creative matrix. Thus, the authorial voice fades away in impersonal tonalities, devoid of all reference to self, a simple medium as T.S. Eliot remarks in “Tradition and the Individual Talent”:

[...] the poet has, not a "personality" to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not impressions and experiences combine in peculiar, unexpected ways. Impressions and experiences which are important for the man may take no place in the poetry, and those which become important in the poetry may play quite a negligible part in the man, the personality. (9)

- 4 That overwhelming creative conscience, the personality of the artist—what (post)modern critics refer to as "auctoriality"—experiences the tormenting agony of living in the shadows of its own literary work. In the introduction to the 1928 edition of *The Sacred Wood*, T.S. Eliot writes:

We can only say that a poem, in some sense, has its own life; that it parts from something quite different from a body of neatly ordered biographical data; that the feeling, or emotion, or vision, resulting from the poem is something different from the feeling or emotion or vision in the mind of the poet. (49)

Such is the moment when the reader steps in, articulating the creative consciousness of the one who plunges into the "mystery of letters" (*le Mystère, dans les Lettres* [Mallarmé 214]) in an act of unfolding and deciphering the hermeneutics of the manuscript, co-authoring the mechanism of textual reference, challenging its "infinite semiosis" (Peirce 339), allowing the circle to open its closure as many times as possible while discovering new connotations which (re)shape the dimension of the literary imaginary. As Gérard Genette writes:

The time scale of literary works is not the defined time scale of writing, but the indefinite time of reading and memory. The meaning of books is before them and not behind them: it is in us; a book is not a complete meaning, a revelation which we are to experience, it is a repository of forms waiting for their meaning, it is the imminence of a revelation that does not come about and which each of us must produce. (Genette 132)

- 5 In this dance of open (re)compositions, the literary character comes second, after the plot itself, as Aristotle wrote in his *Poetics*. From a strict etymological perspective, the term *character* comes from the Greek word *kharaktēr*, which initially referred to a mere "stamping tool". The OED summarises its journey through centuries and contexts, tracing its evolution and growth "from the early sense *"distinctive mark"* to "token, feature, or trait" (early sixteenth century), and from this to "a description, especially of a person's qualities", thus giving rise to *"distinguishing qualities"*. "Defined" both through its relationship with the author and the public, either readers, or spectators, the dramatic character seems most likely to *exist* rather than *undergo* a continuous process of self-development. The anatomy of any dramatic character "and the state of man, / Like to a little kingdom" (Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, I, 70-71) support the intricate taxonomy of every crease and fold of the soul that Gilles Deleuze captures in his words, "the soul is what has folds and is full of folds" (Deleuze 24), which unfolds itself against the eclectic background of "a world whose codes can be elaborated, confirmed and subverted in that contact between writer and reader which the text represents" (Burns 32), in a fascinating interplay of *personality*, *identity*, *self* and *character*. It was only a matter of time and fictional fabric for the dramatic protagonist to come to dominate the stage, overshadow the plot and build up the memory of its personal referential passage.

"Character too is a process and an unfolding" (George Eliot 166)

Fig. 1: Bernard Partridge, cartoon, Mr Punch's Personalities. XII.—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, pencil, ink and wash, published in *Punch*, 12 May 1926, NPG 3668

© National Portrait Gallery, London

Caption: "Your own creation, that great sleuth, / Who spent his life in chasing Truth— / How does he view your late defiance / (O Arthur!) of the laws of Science? / He disapproves your strange vagaries, / Your spooks and photographs of fairies; / And holds you foot-cuffed when you're fain / To navigate the vast inane. / We sympathise with Holmes; and yet / In Punch's heart your name is set; / Of every DOYLE he's still a lover / For DICKY'S sake, who did his cover" (12 May 1926).

- 6 When Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, tired of the figment of his own imagination and almost suffocated by his notoriety, decided to put an end to Sherlock Holmes's adventures and drown him in the roaring Reichenbach waterfalls, in what could be interpreted as a cathartic exercise of redemption, he was far from concluding *The Final Problem* (1893), for, quite the reverse, he was merely articulating it. A well-known *Punch* cartoon of the time [fig. 1] presents the author and character chained together, much to the former's despair, more threatened than ever with merciless dissolution, at times when, though apparently no longer a son of this world, Holmes was most vividly acclaimed and fêted. As a literary character, Conan Doyle's detective stepped into the limelight in 1887, as the protagonist of *A Study in Scarlet*, recommending himself as a brilliant mind, for "no man [...] has brought the same amount of study and of natural talent to the detection of crime which I have done" (Doyle 2003, 19). But who was the *I* who was uttering these thoughts? It could have been a certain *Sherrinford Holmes*, for Sherrinford and not Sherlock was the author's first choice of a name; and who knows what fate would have befallen our hero, had his creator not changed his mind. What is for certain is that the OED would not have recorded any of the following words: *Sherlock* (noun; informal)—"a

person who investigates mysteries or shows great perceptiveness"; *sherlockian* (adjective)—"relating to or characteristic of Sherlock Holmes, especially in showing great perceptiveness"; ~ (noun, informal)—"a fan of the Sherlock Holmes detective stories". Loved like no other fictional character, the lodger of 221B Baker Street lent not only his second, but also his first name to the *public domain* of applied lexicology, as there is also an adjective inspired by his cognomen, namely *holmesian*—"relating to or characteristic of the fictional private detective Sherlock Holmes, especially in being extremely perceptive", as the OED defines the term.

- 7 The unfortunate writer had no idea that he had opened Pandora's box with his *grand finale*; such was the public outrage over the news of Holmes's death, for the description of which no stroke was thick enough and no superlative too ostentatious, that not only did he find himself accosted in the street, but also verbally molested. Willy, more than nilly, Conan Doyle placed himself in the most unfortunate position when he "whirled" Holmes's epitaph in the roaring, foaming waters of the infamous Swiss waterfall. Years later, after the "dreadful event", in a letter published in the same *The Strand Magazine* and addressed to his readers, Doyle himself confessed that "[...] less pleasing, though flattering in their way, were the letters of abuse which showered upon me when it was thought that I had killed him. 'You brute!' was the promising opening of one lady's epistle" (Doyle 1917, 532). Not only author but also magazine were, in the public eye, almost exclusively and organically associated with the acknowledged sleuth, that after the publication of the last story, as an immediate consequence of more than twenty thousand readers cancelling their subscriptions (Ryley & McAllister 25), the very existence of *The Strand* was threatened and it was only moments away from being closed down. People mourned Sherlock Holmes as if he were one of theirs, and their grief was no less genuine: it is said that they even wore black armbands and mourning crêpes on their hats for the month following his death (Ryley & McAllister 25). It may all be a legend, but "legends and myths are largely made of truth", as J.R.R. Tolkien would write in 1951 in a letter to Milton Waldman.

- 8 Now we know what Londoners intuited in 1893: that Sherlock Holmes is of all times and of all people and though he came to life as an "imaginary character", he ended up as an "absolutely convincing human being" (Doyle 1917, 535). In his epistolary confession to the public, Doyle records the most generous empathic concern common people would develop towards their favourite hero, no longer a *self* that lodges among pages of fictional literature, perceived as he was as one of their own, a man of flesh and blood:

[...] a Cornish boatman [...] remarked to me: "When Mr. Holmes had that fall he may not have been killed, but he was certainly injured, for he was never the same man afterwards". I hope the allegation is not true—and, indeed, those who have read the stories backward, from the latest to the first, assure me that it is not so—but it was a shrewd thrust none the less. (Doyle 1917, 532)

- 9 What Conan Doyle could not have known when he decided to part from Sherlock Holmes was that that humble boatman's thoughts would find the most refined and authorised voice to support them, in that of Sigmund Freud's, who wrote, in his famous essay "Creative Writing and Day Dreaming" that:

each [storyteller] has a hero who is the centre of interest, for whom the writer tries to win our sympathy by every possible means and whom he seems to place under the protection of a special Providence. If, at the end of one chapter of my story, I leave the hero unconscious and bleeding from severe wounds, I am sure to find him at the beginning of the next being carefully nursed and on the way to recovery; and

if the first volume closes with the ship he is in going down in a storm at sea, I am certain, at the opening of the second volume, to read of his miraculous rescue—a rescue without which the story could not proceed. (Freud 1908, 149)

- 10 This time it was as if the perspective of the author, and not that of the hero, had been turned upside down in a manner similar to that in which Dickens's protagonist from *Great Expectations*, young Pip, perceived the world when the convict lifted him up by his ankles, literally and figuratively altering his perception of all things, placing him on an outer orbit from which all things look different and estranged from their own significance. This seems to be a symbolic gesture of dilution of the authorial construct, a rupture between *homo interpretant* and *homo symbolicum*, a theory Roland Barthes will articulate years later, in 1969, in "La mort de l'auteur" ("The death of the author"), a critical study that finds itself at the very roots of cultural and psychological literary postmodernity. Thus, invoking David Lodge's novel *Author, Author*, *homo symbolicum* remains an enigmatic cultural referent who kneads the clay of *the becoming within being* (Noica 2009) in a unique and most mysterious way. In an act of literary genesis, the Scottish physician breathed the breath of life into his hero's being and turned him not into a mere projection of his creative thinking, but into a living soul who has inspired a passionate *fan culture* ever since he came to *walk the books*. Although nowadays almost automatically linked with the Internet, *fandom*—in the form of fan-created works—has existed for as long as there have been gifted storytellers to narrate, enthralling plots to tell, (super)heroes to portray and a curious audience to address. Long before words were summoned to articulate the first tales, the bewitching sounds of Pan's flute must have gained their share of passionate devotees, just as Chaucer's pilgrims and Scheherazade's almost never ending stories made an entire world spin around the magic of their utterance. Sherlock Holmes has done much more than that, treading on trails as yet unexplored by any other literary figment: defying time and space, history and canonical perspectives, thereby becoming, in a game of analogies, one of those "touchstone" landmarks Matthew Arnold wrote about in his *Study of Poetry* (1880). "In purely literary terms, Sherlock Holmes has enjoyed the most vigorous afterlife of any fictional character" posits Thomas Leitch in *Film Adaptation and Its Discontents* (Leitch 209).

"My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don't know": *The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle* (Doyle 2003, 391)

- 11 Would it be too much to suggest an idiosyncratic approach to this "touchstone" Sherlock Holmes brilliantly stands for, and contemplate it through the concept of *terroir* summoned not only to explain but also to account for the character's long-lasting popularity? We believe that just as there is a strong connection between the soil, its quality, topography and the quality of grapes, thenceforth, the bouquet and quality of wines, there is also a most intimate connection between Conan Doyle's hero, his time and cultural geography. To put it differently, just as wine is organically tied to its anchoring *terroir*, so too is Sherlock Holmes to his Victorian London. Contemporary wine researchers, as Emmanuelle Vaudour, musing on the concept of *terroir*, take one step farther and introduce the idea of "conscience" that links *terroir* to the ideas of "ancestry, authenticity, and tradition" (Vaudour 119), arguments that must have also

played a substantial part in adding the detective's name to the list of cultural icons of the United Kingdom. The out-of-the-ordinary profile of Sherlock Holmes sprouts from the undeniably fertile terroir of Victorian England—a terrain of strange beauty, odd in appearance, but majestically diverse, a strange mixture of melancholy beauty and soothed cadences which, in Dickens's words, offers "the best of times [...] the worst of times" (Dickens 3). Mark Twain visited London during the Diamond Jubilee celebrations of Victoria's enthronement and was totally mesmerised by the great city:

The contrast between the old England and the present England is one of the things which will make the pageant of the present day impressive and thought-breeding. The contrast between the England of the Queen's reign and the England of any previous British reign is also an impressive thing. British history is 2,000 years old, and yet in a good many ways the world has moved further ahead since the Queen was born than it moved in all the rest of the two thousand put together. (Twain 1047)

- 12 Another equally famous American observer, Henry James, was equally mesmerised:

It is difficult to speak adequately or justly of London. It is not a pleasant place; it is not agreeable, or cheerful, or easy, or exempt from reproach. It is only magnificent. You can draw up a tremendous list of reasons why it should be insupportable. The fogs, the smoke, the dirt, the darkness, the wet, the distances, the ugliness, the brutal size of the place, the horrible numerosity of society, the manner in which this senseless bigness is fatal to amenity, to convenience, to conversation, to good manners—all this and much more you may expatiate upon. You may call it dreary, heavy, stupid, dull, inhuman, vulgar at heart and tiresome in form. [...] But these are occasional moods; and for one who takes it as I take it, London is on the whole the most possible form of life. [...] It is the biggest aggregation of human life – the most complete compendium of the world. (James 355)

- 13 Dr Watson himself adds his voice to the chorus of those who describe the town of those times as "that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained" (Doyle 2003, 4). Character and literary setting alike blend in a most enthralling way popular myth and historical facts. Holmes's London was a city of contrasts, located at the crossroads of *The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations* of 1851, modern engineering technology, scientific detection methods, and horse-drawn hansom cabs that wander along the foggy thoroughfares under the mellow yellow flickering shadows cast by the willowy silhouettes of gaslights, thus prolonging the echoes of a world too obstinate to fade away. "Building one's becoming outside the general frame of the age that accelerated the pulse of time, forcing its pendulum to host febrile and fecund seconds that redrew the face of the world, is the purest expression of a state of withdrawal that became creative principle" (Avarvarei 757): Victorian London is the fabric from which Conan Doyle would spin his detective plots. The special magnetism of the Victorian age has neither instilled the fabric of its fiction with the iridescent lights of Romanticism, nor has it allowed draperies to fall as modernity would encourage, but succeeded, in its inimitable and incredible way, to play with shades and tones of grey, as in a sort of European-style *sumi-e* woodblock print.

While time froze, as the artistic spirit decided to dwell on a Faustian loop that revered the moment and its immortality, rather than celebrate its epic, hastened becoming, emphasizing thus its one-dimensional nature, space made the most of its three-dimensional character, interpreted not so much in strict Euclidian terms, but in volatile contours of chronotopes. Here, the idea of *marginalia* would be revered as it would blend time into the larger picture of space-time and its unique continuum. (Avarvarei 755)

- 14 According to Maciej Sulmicki we like to (re)visit the Victorian *terroir*, driven as we seem to be by our desire to "[...] know what changes have happened, know how we became what we are, cope with the present through knowing about the past [and] love of debate about the things which can never be conclusively proved" (Sulmicki 150-151), proving, once more, how the borrowed French concept contributes to the complex understanding of Holmes's enduring legacy. The robust sap of the earth lent its stamina to a character who, just like the epoch which accommodates him, blends different perspectives, portraying a "contradictory mixture of a man with amazingly unemotional scientific rationality, who is a dreamy romantic violinist and drug taker" (Humphreys 9). Both the *ego* aspect of Holmes's psyche and his *id*—"the hidden cravings" of his mind (Cawelti 104)—are disclosed with the help of his sidekick, Dr Watson, who allows us to peep into his self and discover that he is the man of a single love (though apparently a misogynist, he keeps the photograph of Irene Adler, "the Woman" as his friend refers to her), enthusiastic and disillusioned at times, playful, sometimes, and yet generally canonically rigorous in his reasoning, outlining a personality that is just as idiosyncratic as the nature of the term *terroir* itself. Despite the fact that his creator moulded him from the flesh and blood of demigods, as we can only admire him for his superhuman intelligence, Sherlock Holmes does not estrange his humanity from ours, for "his quirks, his eagerness, his tricks and devices, his energies, his philosophy [...] charm us all" (Humphreys 12). Time has decanted off the personality of the renowned detective from all the 56 stories and 4 short novels that revolve around his brilliant mind and adventurous expeditions and in so doing it has soared, and not plummeted the interest of the public, whence fuelling *fandom*. Apart from the theory of *terroir*, John Cawelti speaks of a series of other reasons that answer for the popularity of detective figures in general, and Sherlock Holmes in particular. He argues that:

readers of classical detective stories [...] shared a need for a temporary release from doubt and guilt, generated, at least in part by the decline of traditional moral and spiritual authorities [...] For those committed to middle-class values of individual achievement [...] the classical detective story offered a temporary release from doubt. First, it affirmed the basic principle that crime was strictly a matter of individual motivations and thus reaffirmed the validity of the existing social order. Second, by reducing crime to a puzzle, a game, and a highly formalized set of literary conventions, it transformed an increasingly serious moral and social problem into an entertaining pastime, thereby enabling a comic metamorphosis of the materials of crime: something potentially dangerous and disturbing was transformed into something completely under control. Finally, the classical detective story enabled readers to entertain some very powerful latent feelings generated by the repressiveness of the family circle by treating in fantasy a domestic murder but in such a way as to negate any feelings of implication or guilt on the part of the reader. (104-105)

- 15 In this labyrinthine journey towards the discovery of truth and the restoration of justice and social order, the brilliant mind of the detective is never alone, for every time it is summoned to "discover the facts" thousands of others, though not so dazzling, tag along. At times of unprecedented critical and technical thinking, when the concept of ratiocination, though coined, according to the OED in the seventeenth century from the Latin *ratiocinate* meaning, "deliberated, calculated", described the rationale doctrine of the moment, Sherlock Holmes, always in pursuit of verity, had to epitomize the abstract and impersonal concept of logical reasoning. In May 1892, five years after *A Study in Scarlet* was published, Conan Doyle disclosed in an

interview for the *Bookman* monthly magazine the real identity behind his character in the person of one of his professors in the Medical School at Edinburg University, Dr Joseph Bell “who would sit in the patients’ waiting room and with a face like a Red Indian and diagnose the people as they came in, before even they had opened their mouths. He would tell them their symptoms, he would give them details of their lives, and he would hardly ever make a mistake” (quoted in Blathwayt 50). Willingly unbalancing the profile of his hero, Doyle acknowledged that “Sherlock is utterly inhuman, no heart, but with a beautifully logical intellect” (50), a fact acknowledged by Holmes himself in *The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone*, “I am a brain, Watson. The rest of me is a mere appendix” (Doyle 2003, 561). Thus, echoing not only the particular case of the Scottish professor, but also articulating the spirit of the time that craved for progress, knowledge and discovery; the only instance according to which Holmes may be regarded as *inhuman*, has little, if anything to do with his lack of “heart”; quite the contrary, there are episodes of deep commiseration for the poor and the weak, substantiating the fact that he comes to speak on behalf of the *rationalia* of his age. We come to contemplate a complex era and a most intricate personality too, who, behind the sphinx-like façade, hides depths of extraordinary humanity.

“Such individuals [did] exist outside of stories”: *A Study in Scarlet* (Doyle 2003, 18)

- 16 Once the world itself had to constantly and incessantly redraw its contours in order to keep pace with and adjust to the burgeoning rhythms of innovation and new social codes, the inner nature, mesmerized as it must have been, would sometimes sink deep within its own precincts, in what may be regarded as a sort of self-protective *autism*. The same sense of inadequacy and “out-of-placeness” could account for Holmes’s apparent lack of empathy and coldness. No wonder that, “[i]n the BBC’s recent television series *Sherlock*, the detective’s difficulty with emotions is portrayed (by Benedict Cumberbatch) as a sign of mild autism” (Davies 23). Approaching authorship and authority with a rather unusual instrument, namely a clinical chart, we discover the best-selling mystery novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time* (the title is inspired by one of Holmes’s famous remarks) authored by British writer Mark Haddon in 2003, whose main character, and also the voice that narrates the story, Christopher John Francis Boone, is a 15-year-(and-3-month-and-2-day)-old boy with “Behavioural Problems” (Haddon 59); mention has to be made that although the words *autism* or *Asperger’s Syndrome* do not appear anywhere within the body of the literary fabric, it is the paratextual inference that points towards the grand themes of autistic “difference”, of “being an outsider, about seeing the world in a surprising and revealing way” (Haddon 2009). In a text he wrote for *The Observer* in 2004, Haddon acknowledged the fact that with his *Curious Incident* he only wanted to “take a life that seemed horribly constrained, to write about it in the kind of book that the hero would read—a murder mystery—and hopefully show that if you viewed this life with sufficient imagination it would seem infinite” (Haddon 2004). Like Holmes, Christopher, a person of highly restrained habits and cognitive eccentricities, manages to detach his emotions and “mind at will” and “however appealing Christopher turns out to be, Haddon’s implied criticism of Baker Street’s resident sage is plain” Laura Miller contends, as “Holmes’s

powers—his ferocious concentration, his ‘cold, precise’ mind and his imperviousness to ‘the softer passions’ are a kind of disability” (31). Christopher confesses:

I like Sherlock Holmes and I think that if I were a proper detective he is the kind of detective I would be. He is very intelligent and he solves the mystery and he says, “The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes.” But he notices them, like I do. Also it says in the book, “Sherlock Homes had, in a very remarkable degree the power of detaching his mind at will. And this is like me too, because if I get really interested in something, like practicing maths, or reading a book about the Apollo missions or great white sharks, I don’t notice anything else and Father can be calling me to come and eat my supper and I won’t hear him. (Haddon 2003, 25)

Interestingly enough, there are echoes that resonate beyond the narrative conventionality that acknowledges Holmes and Christopher as works of fiction, blurring the line between imagination and reality, as Mark Haddon, just as Conan Doyle did, had to face the concern of his real audience with issues related to his imagined universe.

- 17 “I also get a bit worried when people say, ‘I’ve got Asperger’s, my family have never understood me but I gave them your book and it opened a window’. [...] I want to say, ‘I wish the people in your life had been able to make the leap of imagination to understand your world without having to go into a bookshop and buy a book’” (quoted in Lawrence 46). Although at the beginning of the twentieth century the word “autism”, as descriptor of medical and behavioural symptoms, was mostly associated with schizophrenia, it wasn’t until 1943 that Leo Kanner, an Austrian-American psychiatrist and physician, used the term to refer to social and emotional disorder. “He wrote about children with ‘extreme autistic aloneness’, ‘delayed echolalia’ and an ‘anxiously obsessive desire for the maintenance of sameness’. He also noted that the ‘children were often intelligent and some had extraordinary memory’” (Zeldovich 2). All these medical data were carefully transferred onto the clinical chart of modern screenwriters and filmmakers who have all “diagnosed” Sherlock Holmes with a form of developmental disorder, possibly, Asperger syndrome, whose description, according to the United States National Institute of Mental Health, points to the existence of “significant difficulties in social interaction and nonverbal communication, along with restricted and repetitive patterns of behavior and interests” (National Institute of Mental Health, September 2015). All too familiar a scenario for any Sherlock Holmes *aficionado*. Marsha Kinder, an American film scholar and Professor of Critical Studies at the University of Southern California, uses this connection to autism to explain the recurrence of the behavioural pattern in modern film and television adaptations and

why there are so many new versions of Sherlock Holmes currently on popular screens: the series of frenetic Hollywood movies starring Robert Downey Jr. who turns Holmes into an action hero; the British television series featuring Benedict Cumberbatch which is set in the present; and the American television series *Elementary* with British actor Jonny Lee Miller playing him as a recovering drug addict living in New York with a female Asian-American Dr. Watson. All of these new versions emphasize Sherlock’s manic eccentricities and anti-social behaviour along with his super powers of observing concrete details—the special behaviors that link him to those on the spectrum like Christopher. (Kinder 2003, n.p.)

Guy Ritchie’s *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows* (2009) builds its narrative precisely around this *diagnosis*, and authorises the only voice entitled to suggest a medical verdict to utter the words, as his good friend the doctor comments to Holmes that he seems “manic, bordering on psychotic”.

- 18 Echoing again Benjamin Poore's belief that the perennity of Sherlock Holmes and his special relationship to the audience, regardless of time, age, space, culture and religion outlines a sort of "institutionalised religion", Jude Law, in the special features of the *Sherlock Holmes* DVD (2009), marks the only two paths to take when so complex a character is to be approached: the canonical way ("we have been faithful [to the original text]") and the personal, always the most intimate one ("I do think we've also injected it with life") (Liening 50). In the special relationship between the fabric of the *urtext* as canvas and Holmes himself, the accent will always favour the latter, as classic example of infrangible fictional iconography. What seems to matter in any of the epigonic adaptations of the canonic narrative is not so much the way in which the details of the story stack up against the original text *per se*, as is the way in which Sherlock Holmes, *reloaded*, "pervades" the screen. CBS's *Elementary* (2012), a television series that does not, from a narrative perspective, tether to the written texts of Conan Doyle, remains a successful Sherlock Holmes adaptation precisely because it manages to create a most dynamic transposition of the legendary character, renowned for his wit, sarcastic tone and sparkling sense of humour.
- 19 Conan Doyle mastered brilliantly the game of proportions and the enticing interplay of lights and shadows as far as the portrayal of his hero is concerned, welcoming the reader/spectator to become co-editor of Sherlock Holmes's profile, continuing his story and filling in the gaps in millions of ways, as the narrating voice of Dr Watson would, "[...] sometimes I found myself regarding him as an isolated phenomenon, a brain without a heart, as deficient in human sympathy as he was pre-eminent in intelligence". In this, he managed to wonderfully portray a character who, just like Alexandre Dumas's *Le Comte de Monte Cristo*, *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, or Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, as André Bazin suggests in *Qu'est-ce que le cinéma?* "enjoy in some measure an autonomous existence of which the original works are no longer anything more than an accidental and almost superfluous manifestation" (53). Holmes's aversion to women and "his disinclination to form new friendships were both typical of his unemotional character" (Doyle 2003, 682). Paying attention to this final, peculiar detail, namely the detective's sheer affection towards women, HBO Asia's first Japanese production, *Miss Sherlock* (2018), proposed a change of paradigm with its gender-reversed interpretation of the canonic hero; two extremely attractive young women are wandering the streets of modern-day Tokyo, the eccentric consultant detective known as "Sherlock" and Dr Wato Tachibana, a promising surgeon. The *terroir* of contemporary geopolitics is sensitively adapted to the context of the twenty-first century, as Wato-san has just returned from Syria where she served in a humanitarian aid campaign, reversing, thus, the famous encounter between the astute British sleuth and John H. Watson, a former military doctor during the time of the Second Anglo-Afghan War, soon to become his best friend and *amanuensis*. Deeply rooted within the concept of *terroir*, the *appellation d'origine contrôlée*, that goes back into the very dawns of the fifteenth century, springs in all contemporary Holmes-centred adaptations as the iconic 221B, the mysterious consultant's lodgings. Thomas Leitch argues that "in addition to freely mixing elements from inside and outside the canon, the Holmes adaptations make a point of avoiding elements that might threaten the timelessness of Holmes's world, its resistance to anything like progression or historical development" (215). Therefore, as expected, all the key characters in the Sherlock Holmes stories are equally carefully portrayed in the Japanese series, as the

audience becomes acquainted with Inspector Reimon (Kenichi Takito) as the Tokyo counterpart to Inspector Lestrade, Kento Futaba (Yukiyoshi Uzawa) as Mycroft Holmes, Sherlock's older brother, Kimi Hatano (Ran Ito) none other than the gentle Mrs Hudson, the detective's landlady. Although not the first television work that casts a woman as Holmes-like detective, *Miss Sherlock* is undeniably a cinematographic and gender statement in a country dominated by a traditional male-oriented history, that has not encouraged assertiveness, independence, and self-reliance, especially as far as women are concerned. With this gender switch—a symbolic return to the pre-Confucian matrilineal Japan—the HBO producers continue to *introduce* the icon of an age, equally patriarchal and exclusivist, the Victorian era, to a female audience, proving that women can be more than simple devotees. It is one step further from the "pioneering" idea of the *Baker Street Babes* that conjugated fandom using the feminine gender, exclusively. Set up in 2011, and recommending itself as "an all female group of Sherlock Holmes fans" (Pearson 236), the *Baker Street Babes* might be just the place one would have to go to look for *Miss Sherlock* and her friend, Dr Wato Tachibana.

- 20 The freedom with which different screenplays twist the canonical corpus of Holmes's adventures, in versatile and equally enthralling interpretations, allows the hero to be authentic, but at the same time, challengingly audacious in his modernity, "to retain subtle tokens of both his nineteenth-century roots and his universalism" (Leitch 221). Next to that, at the crossroads of two civilisations, the world of the Occident and that of the Orient, there is another story that teaches us that the Japanese perceive transposition not as a mere form of adaptation, imitation, but more likely as the expression of a special kind of "mirroring"—which, in most cases, may surpass the original, in beauty and message. Hence this surprisingly witty *Miss Sherlock*, a reversed transposition of the *urtext* but also a fresh, original approach of the classical iconography.

"I trust that age doth not wither nor custom stale my infinite variety": *The Adventure of the Empty House* (Doyle 2003, 770)

- 21 "Patterns of imaginary", as Northrop Frye would say, building the "myth [as] the central informing power that gives archetypal significance to the ritual and archetypal narrative to the oracle. Hence the myth is the archetype" (Frye 130), and with it we travel. Articulating the myth of Sherlock Holmes has not been an easy job, and the matrix of its becoming was "flooded" by many rivers. If Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle grew tired of his own (fictional) son, the public that took Sherlock to their hearts did nothing else but love and worship him. Centuries and continents apart, young and seniors alike turned *fandom* into the only imaginable dimension of approach to such special a hero. It was their unconditional affection and genuine despair at the news of his death that forced Conan Doyle turn Holmes into the apocryphal Lazarus of detective fiction, and initiate "a literary disease similar to Werther-mania and romantic Byronism" (Davies 325). In the years that overlapped his literary existence, the line between fiction and reality smudged in confusing and somewhat inexplicable contours. What better proof than Doyle's own lines from the article published in *The Strand Magazine* in December 1917, "I never realized what an actual living personality Mr. Holmes was to many people until I heard the very pleasing story of the char-à-banc of

French schoolboys on a tour to London, who, when asked what they wanted to see first, replied unanimously that they wanted to see Mr. Holmes's lodgings in Baker Street" (Doyle 1917, 532). More than once was Sir Arthur asked to mediate people's correspondence to Mr Holmes, either in order to help them "elucidate some point in their private affairs" or offer employment, "I see by some of the morning papers that you are about to retire and take up bee-keeping. If correct I shall be pleased to render you service by giving any advice you may require. I trust you will read this letter in the same spirit in which it is written, for I make this offer in return for many pleasant hours" (Doyle 1917, 532). Mailing letters to Sherlock Holmes outdates children's exercise of addressing letters to their beloved Santa Claus, for it seems that 221B Baker Street has been flooded with letters since 1930s, making Sherlock Holmes if not *the* busiest letter addressee of all time, definitely one of the busiest. Disciples in spirit and critical thinking have set up various Sherlock Holmes clubs and societies scattered around the globe, and "statistics show that "today there are at least 400 groups devoted to Holmes worldwide" of which Japan hosts more than 30 Holmes societies" (Davies 327).

- 22 Had it not been for the existence of the interactive platforms where fandom describes a special universe of expectations, self-projections and heartfelt commitment, such series, as the one produced by the BBC, CBS, or HBO could never have become so popular. Nowadays, artistic enthusiasm conjugates itself in a most intimate relationship with the limitless possibilities of the virtual cyber space, an ally that keeps the written text alive, alert and boisterous. Fandom continues to write massive history even in the twenty-first century, and *The Sherlock Holmes Book* brings evidence of that:

In 2014, devotees dressed in deerstalkers and capes gathered near University College, London in an attempt to create a world record for the largest group of people dressed as Sherlock Holmes. Other incarnations of the great detective include being cast in a Bollywood musical; an appearance as an African American in modern-day Harlem, New York; starring in Japanese manga; teaming up with other fictional characters, such as Batman and Dracula in numerous comics; and even a role as the muppet Gonzo in *The Muppet Show* comic book. More serious Sherlockians and Holmesians enjoy regular Sherlock Holmes debates that bring together the world's experts at London's University College [...] From the original *Strand* magazines to Sherlock Holmes stamps, patches, posters, and beer coasters, Holmes memorabilia is big business. Fans still can't get enough of him [...]. (Davies 327)

- 23 Even as far as the film industry is concerned, fascination is still at home with Mr Holmes, as the most recent BBC television season of *Sherlock* (2010-), starring Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman, was the highest rated yet, not only in the United Kingdom, but also in the United States (Hodgson 2014). As stage, film, television or simple literary character, Sherlock Holmes's longevity seems to spring from what the words of Jeremy Brett, the British actor considered by many film critics and Sherlockians to have created the most genuine portrayal of the great detective (Liening 38), have so intuitively captured "the definitive Sherlock Holmes is really in everyone's head. No actor can fit into that category because every reader has his own ideal" (Jeremy Brett, interview in *TV Times*, 1991). To all this one might add that readers/viewers of all times and ages will find it natural to connect to Mr. Holmes, for no speck of dust will ever smudge his *look*. There are details in his story and idiosyncrasies in his behaviour that account for his versatility and timelessness; his social and emotional reclusiveness, that was considered as an oddity of character in

Victorian times, lends itself to new medical theories which, by amplitude of current medical case narrative, embrace currently delicate psychological problems. Sherlock's behavioural quirkiness speaks the language of many young people, who come to see and understand not the outlandishness in them, but the uniqueness of their gifts. Holmes speaks not only the language of those who suffer from autism spectrum disorder, but also the jargon of those who run into drug addiction, famous as he was for the use of recreational drugs that gave him the merely artificial substitutes to the rush he got from unravelling the puzzling mysteries of his cases. This tech-savvy twenty-first-century detective sports not only an exquisite sartorial style, he sports an equally unique attire that travels beyond the dust jackets of the books that narrate his adventures and finds a way to immerse into the fabric of any good story, time and culture, irrespectively. The BBC One series, *Sherlock* (2010-) adapts the story and gently plays with the habits of the famous detective, renowned for his pipe-smoking; this time he seems to resort to rather *safer* procedures, the nicotine patches, a detail which tells us that he is involved in nicotine replacement therapy—Sherlock seems to be reforming himself, and, at the same time, manages to involve us in articulating our own intuitive strategies. Once again the medical symptomatology opens loops of time, introducing diagnoses that were not yet coined in the Victorian age, but which substantiate countless clinical cases, such as Dr Watson's post-traumatic disorder and psychosomatic limp. The BBC One series has brilliantly demonstrated that each generation imagines its own version of Sherlock Holmes, the (modern) hero who, like a hi-tech Arachne, weaves his journey through time and infuses each and every stopover with his unquestionable spell; not even the "Holmesian method" escapes the iconoclastic vortex of *matrix reimprinting*, as our hero collects weather data with special applications on his smartphone.

- 24 Holmes prides himself with his longevity and magnetism, still fresh and alluring today, over one hundred years since Conan Doyle penned the first story. In *The Invention of the Human*, Harold Bloom argued that Shakespeare "invented the human as we continue to know it" (xviii) by creating characters such as Lear and Hamlet; to this we may add that Conan Doyle's hero, the amazing Sherlock Holmes, helped us understand the labyrinthine beauty of the human mind and the depth of its abysses. Given the opportunity, Shakespeare must have enjoyed following his stories, for which he would have provided an equally famous backdrop—Elizabethan and Jacobean England. Acknowledging the fact that literature encloses the very core of human extraordinariness, whose values overshadow any tellurian-bound construct, thus summoning the *Absolute*, we conclude our article with what Georges Bataille teaches us, namely that "literature is either *the* essential, or it is nothing" (ix; my emphasis). The final lines of Conan Doyle's article from *The Strand Magazine* of 1917 pay homage to the work of William Gillette, but they can also be read as our own tribute to the creator of Holmes himself, destined to stay *in magni nominis umbra*, "I cannot end my remarks more fittingly than by my thanks to the man who changed a creature of thin air into an absolutely convincing human being" (Doyle 1917, 535).

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ABSTRACTS

"Not this, nor that; yet somewhat, certainly" wrote Christina Rossetti in one of her poems, "Later Life", as it were outlining in lyrical terms the subtle alchemy of an age that simply refuses to dim its lights and sense of meaning or fade away richness of narrative. Revisiting the Victorian age means following the story of one of the (still) most fascinating *rite de passage* the threads of history have ever woven, unique in its in-betweenness, spanning over the old and the new, an evanescent landmark of fluid contours. Our intent in this essay is to map the meandering journey of a literary hero that has not only long ceased to live exclusively between the dusty covers of books, but who has "fought" and "gained" a life of his own, defying creator, time itself and literary fashions. "Sacrificed" by his author in the foamy waters of the Reichenbach Falls, he continued to write history due to the arduous passion that his *aficionados* have been architecting around him since 1887. In a reverse mirror projection analysis of Roland Barthes's concept of the death of the author, one witnesses the obstinate denial of transience of a fictional character who

has defied, in bookish terms, Einstein's theory of relativity. The borderline between fiction and true-life existence, late nineteenth and early twenty-first century becomes blurry, just as it was in 1893, when, immediately following the great detective's drowning, 20,000 readers cancelled their subscriptions to *The Strand*, the magazine that published the Holmes stories, while many more, men and women alike, wore black mourning crêpes on their hats or around their arms for the month of Sherlock's death—it may all be a legend, but "legends and myths are largely made of truth", as J.R.R. Tolkien taught us. It is at this very point where our inquisitive journey starts, aiming not at providing facts, but at exploring the territory Conan Doyle's hero has turned into his homeland, where fandom probably sketched its first modern profile. From being the most frequently portrayed literary character in film history—featured in more than 200 productions—to Japanese Sherlock manga, even designing a new urban behavioural pattern, to signature fashion pieces that have written a history of their own, there is a whole *terroir* that continues to mesmerize and whose address simply reads *221B Baker Street, London, the World, the Universe*.

« *Not this, nor that; yet somewhat, certainly* », écrit Christina Rossetti dans l'un de ses poèmes, « *Later Life* », évocation lyrique de l'alchimie subtile d'une époque qui se refuse à « tamiser les lumières », à renoncer au sens ou à faire fi de la richesse du récit. Revisiter l'époque victorienne signifie suivre l'histoire de l'un des rites de passage les plus fascinants que les fils de l'histoire aient jamais tissé, unique dans son entre-deux, à cheval entre l'ancien et le nouveau, évanescent point de repère aux contours mouvants. Notre intention est de retracer ici le parcours sinueux d'un héros littéraire qui a non seulement depuis longtemps cessé de vivre exclusivement entre les couvertures poussiéreuses de livres, mais qui a « combattu » et remporté une victoire sur sa propre vie, sur son créateur, sur le temps et sur les modes littéraires. « Sacrifié » par son auteur dans l'écume des chutes de Reichenbach, Sherlock Holmes n'a pas pour autant cessé d'écrire son histoire et ce, en raison de la passion ardente que ses *aficionados* ressentent pour lui depuis 1887. Dans une analyse par projection en miroir inversé du concept de mort de l'auteur dû à Roland Barthes, on soulignera le refus obstiné de la fugacité de la part de ce personnage fictif qui défie, dans le domaine de la littérature, la théorie de la relativité d'Einstein. La frontière entre fiction et réalité, fin du XIX^e et début du XXI^e siècle, se fait floue, comme elle l'était déjà du reste en 1893, lorsque, immédiatement après la noyade du grand détective, 20 000 lecteurs ont résilié leur abonnement à *The Strand*, le magazine qui publiait les aventures de Holmes, et que nombre d'autres, hommes et femmes, se mirent à porter des crêpes de deuil noires sur leur chapeau ou autour de leur bras le mois de la mort de Sherlock – ce qui est peut-être une légende, mais « les légendes et les mythes sont faits en grande partie de vérité », comme nous le rappelle J.R.R. Tolkien. C'est en 1893, donc, que commence notre curieux voyage, qui vise non seulement à rendre compte de faits avérés, mais aussi à explorer le territoire devenu la patrie du héros de Conan Doyle – l'un des premiers *fandoms* de l'histoire. Personnage littéraire le plus souvent représenté dans l'histoire du cinéma – avec plus de 200 adaptations –, mais aussi dans le manga japonais, nouveau modèle de comportement urbain, accessoires vestimentaux emblématiques qui ont connu leur propre histoire : il y a tout un *terroir* associé à Sherlock Holmes qui continue de fasciner et dont l'adresse serait *221B Baker Street, Londres, le monde, l'univers*.

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Mots-clés: fandom littéraire, époque victorienne, Sherlock Holmes, (re)construction, iconographie fictive

oeuvre citée Some Personalia about Mr Sherlock Holmes, Final Problem (The), Study in Scarlet (A), Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle (The), Adventure of the Mazarin Stone (The), Adventure of the Empty House (The)

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