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Imperial and Critical Cosmopolitans: Screening the Multicultural City on *Sherlock* and *Elementary*

Anne Kustritz

Abstract: *This article argues that two modern reinterpretations of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's* Sherlock Holmes*, that is the BBC's* Sherlock *(2010–) and CBS's* Elementary *(2012–), differ in their representations of the city in ways that bear significant political ramifications. In particular,* Sherlock *repeats many of the social structures of Conan Doyle's stories that construct an imperial cosmopolitan vision of life in London, while* Elementary *offers an interpretation of Holmes's life in modern New York with a critical cosmopolitan ethos. Building on the works of Craig Calhoun, Ann Stoler, Paul Gilroy, and Walter Mignolo, this article argues that imperial cosmopolitanism refers to a colonial node wherein the global circulation of goods and people leads to increases in segregation, social differentiation, and ethnocentrism, whereas critical cosmopolitanism refers to circumstances under which the arrangement of the global city creates increased contact between various kinds of people as well as decreased social differentiation, which may lead to mutual understanding, solidarity, and what Lauren Berlant calls political empathy. This article demonstrates these two divergent approaches by analysing the programmes' aesthetic choices, depictions of social contact between Holmes and the diverse inhabitants of the city, and the representations of women, particularly with regard to the casting of Watson. As a result, the article finds that* Sherlock *depicts London from above as a space that must be strategically traversed to maintain social distance, while* Elementary *depicts New York from street level as a space wherein Holmes learns to encounter diverse others as co-equal citizens and the audience is invited to experience multiple perspectives. Consequently,* Sherlock *reiterates an imperial cosmopolitan view of urban globalisation, while* Elementary *includes key preconditions for the emergence of critical cosmopolitan mentalities.*

What if there were nothing special about Sherlock Holmes? As first written, Holmes became a genre-defining detective, remarkable for his use of then cutting-edge scientific techniques in crime detection, at the same time as real-life police increasingly relied upon new methods like fingerprinting (Conan Doyle; Thomas). Holmes served as an exemplar of enlightenment order, capable of securing the capital of the British Empire through a combination of romantic genius and rationality. However, just like the rising "sciences" of social typologies, his trademark "deductive method" often relied upon stereotypes and social separation, reflecting an imperial cosmopolitan stance that welcomes flows of unequal global trade into the city only on the condition of strict segregation. While the BBC's *Sherlock* (2010–) doubles down on Holmes's (Benedict Cumberbatch) uniqueness and social isolation, CBS's *Elementary* (2012–) emphasises the shared humanity of Holmes (Jonny Lee Miller) and a surprising network of people his former incarnations may have held in contempt. Particularly, the decision to cast

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Asian-American actress Lucy Liu as Joan Watson, changing the race and gender of Holmes's traditional companion, facilitates *Elementary*'s transformation of Sherlock Holmes from an imperial to a critical cosmopolitan story. Unlike *Sherlock*'s London, commonly depicted from above in surveillance-eye-view and carefully navigated by cab to maintain social distance, the modern metropole of New York is depicted in *Elementary* as a multicultural space best known by its inhabitants at street level, wherein unpredictable collisions between people may occur and unforeseen forms of solidarity may emerge. As such, the stylistic and narrative differences between *Sherlock* and *Elementary* dramatise contemporary political debates about the challenges of xenophobia, integration, immigration, and diversity: are modern cities neoimperial spaces rife with constant external threats that must be vigilantly controlled via surveillance and uniquely gifted authorities with genetically superior talents? Or can the modern city be imagined as a productive contact zone between cultures, classes, and lifestyles that produces the foundation of critical cosmopolitan pluralist democracy through unpredictable street-level encounters and the development of what theorist Lauren Berlant characterises as that most radical political feeling—empathy?

Rival Cosmopolitanisms: Crime and Connection in the Imperial City

The imperial qualities of the original Sherlock Holmes stories reflect the era when they were written, and colour the depiction of key characters and elements of the story world (Ferguson; Harris; Siddiqi; Thomas). Yet, as I have argued with Melanie Kohnen elsewhere, rather than a thoroughly modern, integrated, multicultural city, even the London navigated by Holmes in the BBC's contemporary adaptation *Sherlock* often reproduces imperial assumptions about the inheritance of criminality, and the danger of lower classes, unruly women, and foreigners who threaten to pollute the body politic. In contrast, *Elementary*, the modern American adaptation of Holmes, offers a critical cosmopolitan vision of the contemporary city and its many diverse inhabitants. It is important to stress that I am not arguing that critical cosmopolitanism is an inherent feature of American productions, transnational adaptation, or New York City. Indeed, large globalised metropoles like London have historically been seen as exemplars of cosmopolitan mentalities, although critics argue that these range from imperial cosmopolitanism, which enhances ethnocentrism, to critical, decolonial, or dialogical cosmopolitanism, which reinforces shared humanity and global citizenship (Calhoun; Mendieta; Mignolo). Instead of any inherent property of London or New York, a series of narrative and aesthetic choices situate each series within the imperial versus critical cosmopolitan modes.

Divergences between this isolated, imperial Holmes of the original canon and *Elementary*'s New York dramatise a paradox inherent to the fetishisation of the multicultural city as a privileged space wherein cosmopolitanism arises. Particularly in Kant's account, the forces of globalisation within a large city provided opportunities to encounter difference and thus to develop a cosmopolitan mindset prioritising identification with humanity over narrow localism or nationalism (Calhoun). As the centre of a vast imperial network for circulating goods and people, London could thus become a cosmopolitan city par excellence. However, such accounts of the city within globalisation overlook the numerous social, legal, and spatial practices that separate and isolate various populations both within the city and across the empire, drastically limiting mobility and contact between social groups. For example, historian Ann Stoler argues

that colonial cities limited mobility by defining rape as a spatial crime that required legal, behavioural, and architectural technologies to guarantee the separation of white women and men of colour. Similar logics motivated the policing of African Americans' social and spatial mobility from the formal segregation of Jim Crow to the vigilante violence of lynching (Thabit). In such a system, those privileged few able to cross the city do not necessarily gain a more open mentality, but often rather emphasise their superiority. Further, mere contact between diverse peoples cannot automatically be assumed to produce a tolerant cosmopolitan mentality, as such encounters have also historically produced increased xenophobia, civic withdrawal, and displacement, as in the histories of white flight, urban riots, zoning, and gentrification (Thabit). Such responses might manifest themselves in the fear of urban crime when crime became intrinsically associated with colonial contagion, as in the original Holmes stories, or minority gang violence in the American context, as well as the threat of foreign terrorism (Gillespie and Harpham; Puar; Welch, Price, and Yankey). Charlotte Lemanski likewise notes a particularly insidious reinstantiation of apartheid-like geographic social segregation as a result of race-based fear of crime in South Africa. Thus, an imperial cosmopolitanism might describe a globalised context wherein the flow of people, goods, and ideas internationally and within the boundaries of the city do not produce greater investment in shared humanity, but rather an increase in nationalist and ethnocentric strategies of segregation, hierarchy, containment, and control.

Traces of imperial cosmopolitan approaches to the diverse, global character of London appear throughout the original Holmes canon. As Yumna Siddiqi argues, social challenges produced by the circulation of people to and from the colonies appear primarily as frightening and exotic natives, and as returning colonial agents who bring foreign contamination home. Siddiqi argues that Conan Doyle uses the metaphor of Watson's slow recuperation from his colonial war wound to indicate that returned colonial agents cannot be fully reincorporated into the body politic until they have shed all the baggage of their foreign life and healed from its sickening effects. Watson contrasts with characters who cannot overcome the influence of the colonies and threaten to infect English society with its so-called atavistic qualities, including Colonel Moran and the conspirators of "The Sign of the Four" (Conan Doyle 90–160, 483–95). In many of these cases the colonies and their people function as vectors of contagion, which, Susan Harris specifies, includes crime and racial degeneration, both figured in colonial rhetoric as forms of infectious disease. Indeed, as argued by Alison Moore, because sadism originally reflected either racial degeneracy or primitivism, criminality became associated with reduced genetic development, exemplified by foreign colonial subjects and the British lower classes. Thus, scholars Michael Gillespie, Samuel Harpham, and Ronald Thomas each also point out that while such associations between crime and contagious degeneracy stoke ethnocentric xenophobia and racism, they also shore up faith in the colonial project by providing Holmes and scientific advances in policing as proof of British superiority and "elementary" philosophical rationales for social containment (see also Clausson and Ferguson).

My own previous work highlighted additional logics associated with the social segregation of imperial cosmopolitanism, specific to Conan Doyle's use of the "deductive method". Kohnen and I argued that because of colonial circulation of people and industrialisation, the rapidly expanding nineteenth-century city often threatened to upset traditional structures for social separation, prompting governments to undertake massive building projects intended to penetrate the geographical opacity of the city, most importantly Baron

Haussman's redesign of Paris (Benjamin). In "The Copper Beeches" Holmes agrees that urban design creates greater security (Conan Doyle 323). However, in addition to modelling the cityscape itself on principles of surveillance, penetrating the social opacity of the city's crowds required the investment in a new science of social typology (Halttunen). Holmes's "science of deduction" popularised new methods in crime detection that increasingly relied on classifying bodies and dividing them into types. For example, Holmes's deductions intuit intelligence from a large head, susceptibility to poison from the female body, and villainy from several features including a "foxy face", "small shrewd, beady eyes", a stooped posture, sunken eyes, and a protruding forehead (Conan Doyle 244–56, 469–82, 964, 966). The belief, echoed by Holmes, that physiology and inheritance determined people's path through life fuelled the eugenics movement, and offered urbanites a sense of security that criminality could be visually determined and separated from the rest of the population, a philosophy that underwrote strategies of social segregation within imperial cities (Halttunen).

In addition, in stories such as "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle", "The Adventure of the Devil's Foot", and "The Adventure of the Abbey Grange", the Holmes of Conon Doyle's stories often designated himself an ultimate moral arbiter, with the knowledge and authority necessary to discern between criminals who would offend again and thereby must be turned in to the police, and those who his sound chastisement could reform (Conan Doyle 244–56, 469–82, 635–49). He thereby took the position of a man apart on numerous levels, set above the crowd of the city for both his greater intellectual and moral capacities. As argued by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, the emergence of mass culture and mass audiences also enabled parallel methods of separation from the homogenous masses via practices of distinction, which became key symbols of class (125–48). Holmes's ability to intellectually penetrate all the secrets of the city's crowds thereby also consolidates his position as a fundamentally superior, separate, and distinct kind of person from those he surveys, categorises, and judges.

However, the imperial structures of cosmopolitanism need not necessarily remain insurmountable, when combined with a critical apparatus. Many studies of "actually existing cosmopolitanism" uncover the persistence of social and spatial separation between diverse people within cities today (Beck). Yet, curiously, those by Ranji Devadason and Floris Müller on London and Amsterdam also blame immigrants and minorities for their apparent lack of cosmopolitan development. To do so, they downplay the reasons their study participants report for their deidentification with the cosmopolitan city, predominantly the intolerance and racism they experienced there. Indeed, deidentification with place and its attendant exclusions formed the basis of much black cosmopolitanism thought, from W. E. B. Du Bois to Paul Gilroy, who imagined cosmopolitanism partly as a refusal of their multiracial but white-supremacist mother-country.

In the tradition of a cosmopolitanism that longs for an inclusive multinational community precisely because of the limits of actually existing communities, critical cosmopolitanism or dialogic cosmopolitanism might describe an aspirational ethic wherein multinational flows connect people and places without imposing new forms of hierarchy. Walter Mignolo warns that such an aspiration requires a thoroughly critical and decolonial approach to globalisation, acknowledging all the many ways that increased contact and movement of goods and people around the world have repeatedly served to consolidate Western power and exacerbate the

disparity between the world's rich and poor. A cosmopolitan ethic that ignores these darker consequences of globalisation requires that those most disadvantaged adopt the global logic which exploits them. A critical, decolonial cosmopolitanism seeks to cultivate connections of mutuality and recognition, which require deidentification with and rejection of many of globalisation's celebrated nodes and accomplishments. Multinational cities may become the nexus of these connections, but they have no inherent power to produce the potential resultant ethical and relational transformation. Indeed, like all utopian political dreams, cosmopolitanism perhaps cannot be fully realised, but its potential can be glimpsed in innumerable lived moments when the lingering imperial structures of the global city give way to alternate modes of enacting urban space and sociality.

The figure of the detective becomes an ideal embodiment of these contrasting conceptualisations of the imperial and critical cosmopolitan city because, as Richard Lehan writes, "[d]etectives bring the city back to human scale" (84). In discussing Walter Benjamin's association between the *flâneur* and the detective, Dana Brand notes that each personage is constantly engaged in traversing and explaining the city. As virtuoso interpreters and readers of the city's sites, events, and people, many detectives, including Holmes, unify and reveal the potential chaos of the city through the exercise of human intellect by proposing a rubric of the principles that underlie and govern urban life. They thereby create a privileged site where competing ideologies of the city become visible, and where readers can glimpse the consequences of contact between the city's diverse districts and people. Modern Holmes adaptations *Sherlock* and *Elementary* thus construct a social ethic of contemporary urban life. Their differing approaches become apparent first through their opening credit sequences, contrasting a computational surveillance aesthetic or a ground-up view, secondly in the way each series positions Holmes vis-à-vis the diverse inhabitants of the city, and finally in the casting of Watson and the representation of women.

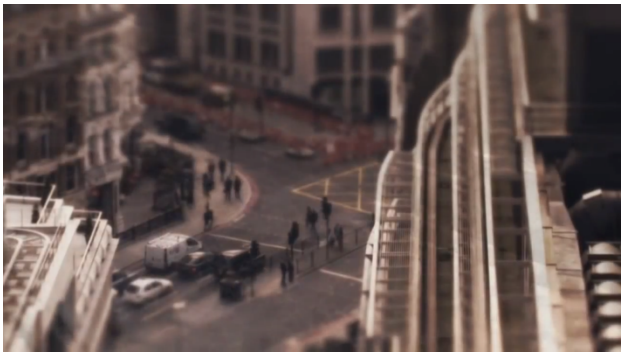




Figure 1 (left): Opening sequence: London from above. *Elementary*. CBS Studios, 2012–.
Figure 2 (right): Opening sequence: New York from street-level. *Sherlock*. BBC Wales, 2010–. Screenshots.

New Holmes in New Homes: London from Above, New York from Street-Level

These differences first become apparent in the two series' opening credits. *Sherlock*'s credits feature images of London taken from above, which then zoom in to focus on individual people and places, with overlays of information. The aesthetics thus mimic technologies of

surveillance like satellite and telescopic lenses. These images emphasise the masterful position of the viewer and the detective by rendering the city as visually penetrable and visualising it as discrete pieces of information. The effect is partly produced through a classic aspect of the cinematic apparatus; by soaring through the air in a way that the unassisted human body cannot, such shots can offer the audience a feeling of power (Baudry). Yet these particular shots also align with contemporary strategies for controlling the city by rendering it as information (see Sack). This surveillance aesthetic is apparent throughout *Sherlock*, which repeatedly stresses the importance of the city's digitisation (Kustritz and Kohnen). For example, text messages and Google searches become part of the visible environment and when Sherlock must chase a cab through the streets of Soho the image in his brain is not from personal experience of the city, but from Google Maps ("A Study in Pink"). *Sherlock*'s Holmes has thus been reinterpreted from a master of categorising people, to a master of sifting and processing the digital information that controls and categorises modern society (Coppa; Kustritz and Kohnen).

The introduction to *Elementary*, in contrast, features a long sequence of cause and effect, demonstrated by a Rube Goldberg machine, also culminating in a visualisation of the city. Yet, in this case the visualisation features the skyline, taken from street level. In his essay "Walking in the City" Michel de Certeau argues that the view of the city from the top of the then World Trade Center appears to organise the entire city's pathways and activities for the viewer's pleasure and control, while, at street level, the city becomes meaningful in millions of quotidian relationships between people and architecture in which pedestrians resignify its features through their individual use. Thus, within de Certeau's theory, *Sherlock*'s credit sequence mimics imperial fantasies of perfect control over the city and its denizens through visual penetration of all its secrets from above, while *Elementary* represents the city from street level, where it belongs to everyone who lives there and its meanings remain opaquely idiosyncratic and personal, discernible only through close contact. This street-level view thereby offers a far more promising setting where a critical cosmopolitan story might unfold. Although this dichotomy in the credit sequences may appear mild, given their short length, they may function as metaphors for interpreting each series as a whole.

The Power of Proximity: Cosmopolitanism from Encounter to Recognition

In the second instance, each respective Holmes's casual interactions with the many diverse citizens of the city reveal an orientation toward or away from social separation and elitism, key concepts in an imperial versus critical cosmopolitan outlook. The episodic nature of serial crime narration within the long arcs of American network television also facilitates *Elementary*'s ability to bring Holmes and Watson into quotidian contact with New York's many neighbourhoods and people, a possible precondition for the development of political empathy (Berlant). *Sherlock*'s protagonists often take cabs through the city, which references Victorian Hansom cabs, but creates an isolating effect whereby Holmes and Watson (Martin Freeman) maintain a physical isolation impossible in the crowded underground (Kustritz and Kohnen). These choices suit the BBC's short miniseries format, which requires constant movement to fit complex character and plot development into a few episodes. *Elementary*'s long seasons can accommodate narrative detours in which Holmes, Watson, and the viewers spend quality time with numerous secondary characters. On *Elementary,* these themes converge when a snowstorm

halts most regular forms of transportation, and Holmes and Watson commandeer a snowplough to foil a bank heist ("Snow Angels"). At first Holmes attempts to use his authority to simply order the plough driver to chauffer them throughout the city, and the female driver firmly refuses. Watson then intercedes, as Watson in the BBC version also often does. Yet, instead of taking over responsibility for social interactions, *Elementary*'s Watson requires that Holmes take the time and care to engage with people directly, a process that plays out in a microcosm as, through their day trailing bank thieves in the snowplough, Holmes and the driver come to not just tolerate each other, but exhibit a strong mutual recognition and respect. "This caring lark", as the BBC's Sherlock dismissively calls it, fundamentally facilitates Holmes and Watson's ability to navigate and understand the city's spaces and people ("The Great Game").



Figure 3: *Elementary*. "Snow Angels." Written by Jason Tracey, directed by Andrew Bernstein. CBS Studios, 4 Apr. 2013. Screenshot.

The series perhaps most starkly differentiate themselves in Holmes's encounters with the homeless. Holmes originally employed a group of street children to collect intelligence, known as the Baker Street Irregulars, which *Sherlock* reintroduces as homeless adults. Yet no trace remains of the arguably patronising *noblesse oblige* of the earlier version in Sherlock's coldly business-like interaction with his informants, after which he states his intention to "disinfect" himself ("The Great Game"). That word choice further dehumanises the homeless by making them a source of contamination, and echoes construction of homeless populations as a moral and social contagion. The Holmes of *Elementary* has a very different encounter when a clue in a murder leads him to a homeless man selling missing mobile phones ("Snow Angels"). After

interrogating him for information, Holmes concludes the interaction not only by refusing to turn the stolen phones over to the police, but also providing the man with the benefit of his expertise to increase profit in the sale of the remaining phones. Unlike cases wherein the original Holmes let criminals go if he thought his chastisement could lead to their reform, *Elementary*'s Holmes acts not out of a paternalistic desire to morally improve the homeless man, nor a purely utilitarian extraction of his information, but instead engages with him on a human level to help meet his specific needs in that moment. Notable also, in *Elementary* Holmes sits in close physical proximity to the homeless man, turning imperial cosmopolitan fear of contamination and tactics of separation and distinction on their head.

Repeatedly *Elementary* offers similar scenes in which Holmes comes into close physical, emotional, and moral proximity with populations that many of his predecessors held at further than arm's length. At times he even tests the limits of Watson's prejudices. Thus, Holmes brings Watson into contact with Ms. Hudson (Candis Cayne), a transwoman who becomes their housekeeper ("Snow Angels"). Holmes likewise at first chooses Alfredo (Ato Essandoh), an African American, former prison inmate, as his Narcotics Anonymous (NA) sponsor to goad Watson into an act of overt intolerance—which she refuses—but he soon comes to depend on and confide in his sponsor, developing a mutual respect to the extent that he tries to hide information that may make Alfredo think badly of him ("The Long Fuse").

Further, these processes of encounter also reflect upon each series' portrayal of Holmes's own characterisation as they either facilitate or undermine his ability to construct himself as superior to, and separate from, the masses, and the series' construction of crimefighting as the concern of uniquely gifted elites or communities. The BBC version updates the markers of melancholic genius used by Conan Doyle with a modern conception of psychopathology, classifying Sherlock as a high-functioning sociopath and thereby neurobiologically distinct from "normal" human beings ("A Study in Pink"). As a result, *Sherlock* intensifies what Paula Reiter describes as the original stories' function in consolidating the professionalisation of crimefighting, and the elite distinction of consulting experts. At its beginning, in *Elementary* Holmes attempts to likewise situate himself as separate and superior to others on a biological and psychological level; yet his actions and Watson's observations gradually reveal his shared humanity and situate him within communities. For example, while all three versions of the character explain an iteration of the "brain attic" theory to Watson, proposing that his unique brain must discard or delete certain information to make room for facts central to detection and thus retains no space for the solar system or the stories of fellow NA attendees, only *Elementary*'s Watson challenges Holmes by unequivocally stating that the brain does not work that way (Conan Doyle 21; "While You Were Sleeping"; "The Great Game"). Importantly, Watson states that *the* brain does not fit Holmes' theory, implicitly contradicting his assertion that only *his* brain uniquely functions in such a manner. According to *Elementary*'s Watson, Holmes's brain is not neurobiologically superior or special; it is just human. Watson thereby denies his elitist attempt to separate himself from the masses, emphasising the shared humanity of all brains and all occupants of the city, a key characteristic of a critical cosmopolitan mentality.

The incident also ties into Holmes's insistence that, unlike other addicts who remain biologically and psychologically tempted by drugs, he will have no difficulty staying sober after

making the rational decision to quit. His use of the brain attic story to avoid engaging with NA meetings marks one of many attempts to avoid seeing himself as in any way similar to other drug addicts or vulnerable to his bodily or emotional needs. Holmes consequently undermines any possibility of forming empathy, understanding, or community with other addicts by setting himself firmly apart. As his sober companion, Watson insists that Holmes's investigative talent does not grant him any special exemption from the biological or psychological processes of addiction, and requires that he continue to attend NA and find a sponsor, setting off a number of little power struggles between the pair throughout the first season. Their uneasy détente appears to reach a boiling point in Holmes's refusal to accept his one-year sobriety chip and speak to the NA group about the milestone ("Dead Man's Switch"). Despite his slowly increased willingness to attend NA meetings, the anniversary incites a paroxysm of protest from Holmes who once again stridently claims that he shares nothing in common with the masses of drug users who commonly remain vulnerable to the lure of addiction. Alfredo brings the crisis to a head by emphasising Holmes's sameness with other drug users when he reminds Holmes that the anniversary is not about him, but rather his responsibility to the NA group to inspire others that they can also escape a similar situation. In the episode's ending Holmes admits to Watson what she knew all along; he could not overcome drug addiction through the rational exercise of his will alone and actually lapsed a few days after his supposed sober anniversary. Holmes appears visibly shaken by the admission, but promises to share the truth with Alfredo as well. He thus leaves behind an image of himself as above the petty weaknesses and concerns of average people in order to forge genuine, egalitarian relationships with those around him, opening himself to the possibility of a critical cosmopolitan form of empathy, solidarity, and community.

Likewise, as in the original Holmes canon, at the outset of the series *Elementary*'s Holmes also sets himself above the law, and thereby above all the average citizens who must obey its strictures. In the BBC adaptation, Sherlock's vigilante decision to throw a man off a building because he threatened Mrs. Hudson (Una Stubbs) reinforces his position as a separable type of person, singularly capable of such acts, justified in committing them, and immune from punishment ("A Scandal in Belgravia"). The pattern is repeated at the end of season three when Sherlock alone is capable of assassinating the villain ("His Last Vow"). Believing that he discovered his lover's killer, *Elementary*'s Holmes similarly captures and tortures Colonel Moran (Vinnie Jones) ("While You Were Sleeping"). Yet, he must later seek to regain the trust of those around him, including Watson and his police employer Captain Gregson (Aidan Quinn), as he finds himself surprised to sincerely miss their presence and affection. In both Conan Doyle canon and *Sherlock* the police serve as a bumbling and incompetent foil to reinforce Holmes's unique brilliance. Yet, after admitting that he does not regret torturing Moran, Holmes does not seek to defend himself or retaliate when Gregson punches him, a brutal but effective means of demonstrating Holmes's realisation that he violated Gregson's trust, and an acceptance of Gregson's right to judge him ("The Red Team"). By attempting to repair these relationships after his vigilantism, Holmes re-enters society as one of its members, bound by the same laws and restraints as everyone. Unlike an imperial cosmopolitan society, which polices according to social hierarchies, *Elementary* thus exhibits a critical cosmopolitan stance by reinforcing all citizens' equality under the law.

Not even his intellect ultimately distinguishes Holmes from the rest of humanity in *Elementary*. In addition to genius, Holmes's skills developed from a privileged polymath

education, leaving only his brother Mycroft (Rhys Ifans) as an intellectual equal, which offers an implicit genetic and class-based explanation for his talent. *Sherlock* explicitly makes genius for solving crime a property of an exclusive subspecies (Kustritz and Kohnen). In contrast, although Holmes's skills seem similarly exclusive at the outset of the series, *Elementary* gradually demonstrates that even these spectacular talents need not isolate or elevate Holmes. While Sherlock's studies of forensic pathology often render Watson irrelevant on the BBC, Watson's specialised medical knowledge frequently provides crucial clues on *Elementary* that Holmes overlooks. Yet it is not only Watson, who also possesses a privileged education, whose expertise Holmes appreciates. Gregson also bests Holmes intellectually by immediately detecting his true, hidden motive for relocating to New York ("Rat Race"). Most tellingly, in *Elementary* Holmes eventually begins to teach Watson the science of deduction, and later takes on two other apprentices, including a rape victim and a former gang member who have no specialised education or experience. In many versions Watson appears perpetually amazed by what Holmes can accomplish, and indeed in *Sherlock* Mycroft (Mark Gatiss) directly points out Watson's function in reinforcing Holmes's ego and sense of intellectual superiority, stating "Aren't ordinary people adorable? Well you know. You've got John. I should get myself a live-in one" ("The Reichenbach Fall"). In *Elementary*, by presenting his skills as a potentially knowable system that Watson and others can master, Holmes radically demystifies his investigations and his intellectual gifts, democratising crimefighting rather than limiting it to an elite. Only through these and many other incremental acknowledgements of his shared humanity and connection with others does Holmes display the mutuality and recognition necessary to engage in genuine human relationships and transform his encounters with the city's marginalised from a patronising paternalism into moments of potential critical cosmopolitanism.



Figure 4: Woman as absolute Other: Irene Adler (Lara Pulver) in *Sherlock*. "A Scandal in Belgravia." Written by Steven Moffat, directed by Paul McGuigan, BBC Wales, 1 Jan. 2012. Screenshot.

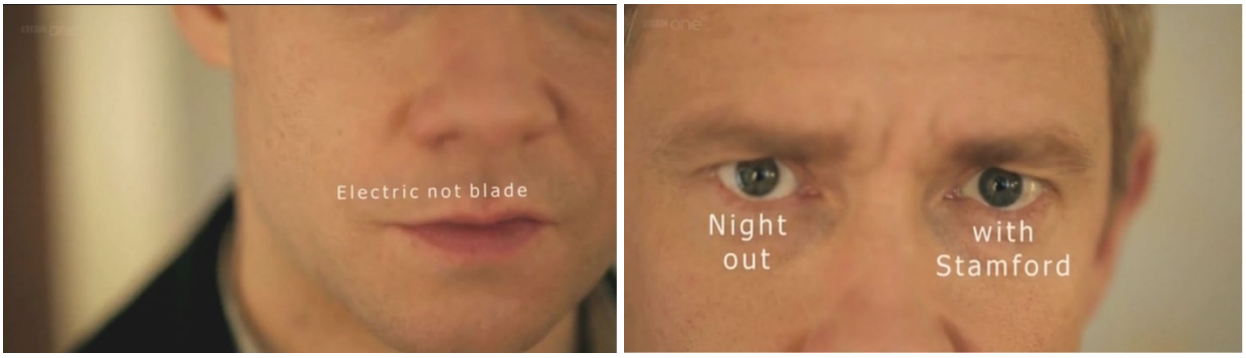
Gender in Intersectional Perspective: Otherness and Quotidian Intimacy

The final but perhaps most significant decision made by *Elementary* is the choice to cast Lucy Liu, an Asian-American actor, as Watson. Historically, it has been the case in both America and Britain that women and characters of colour were vastly and disproportionately outnumbered on both film and television, and even more acutely so as main characters (Smith). For example, studies by Dana Mastro and Bradley Greenberg and by Elizabeth Monk-Turner note that Asian Americans have made little inroads on television, as in both 2000 and 2010 they find only around 1% representation among American TV characters (Mastro and Greenberg 691, 695; Monk-Turner 105). Several works of LeiLani Nishime specify that even when Asian characters are present they are often misrecognised as white, or cast with a white actor, and thus "whitewashed" beyond visibility. As a result of these trends, when Asian-American characters appear, they do so primarily as "model minorities", whose only purpose is to reinforce the negative stereotyping of other minorities, or as supporting characters in relation to stories told from the point of view of white male characters, and thus they rarely tell their own stories (Aoki; Kawai; Ono and Pham). Casting Liu as Watson thereby makes an incredible difference in the critical cosmopolitan structures of *Elementary* because, as one of the two leads, and the character most likely to stand in for the average viewer, she demands both Holmes's and the audience's direct engagement with a woman and person of colour, making it much more difficult to construct the overall narrative, or the character of Holmes, as ethnocentric and imperialist. Furthermore, as a main character engaged in telling her own story, she cannot remain a mysterious cypher of otherness; Liu's Watson also invites audiences into intimate engagement with her psyche, and indeed many of the long arcs of the series deal with unravelling her personal history and motivations, which both become clearer to the viewer and to Holmes over time.

The representation of Liu as Watson creates a stark contrast with two of the BBC *Sherlock*'s representational strategies for rendering both Asian people and women mysterious, unknowable, absolute Others. In "The Blind Banker" Sherlock finds the first piece of information to completely elude his networked digital understanding of the city is a series of Chinese characters, positioned as primordial and unintelligible even though Mandarin is the most widely spoken language in the world. Chinatown similarly overwhelms the usually perceptive detective, as a panning shot seems to unify the neighbourhood's people and things into one mass of mute total difference that all looks the same to Sherlock, to the extent that he overlooks the villain standing in front of him in the crowd (Kustritz and Kohnen). As a result, *Sherlock* repeats the damaging tropes identified in Edward Said's classic critique of Orientalism, and more specifically reinforces a longstanding stereotype for representing Asian people and cultures as frighteningly alien and menacing known as "The Yellow Peril" (Aoki; Ono and Pham). Indeed, the villains of the episode connect a plethora of Orientalist stereotypes both old and new, and their acrobatic act recalls the character Tonga from "The Sign of the Four" (Cockbain; Conan Doyle 89–160). As the only major Asian characters in each series, Joan Watson and her tepidly melodramatic family appear almost shockingly banal in comparison to the BBC's family of fratricidal communist acrobatic assassins. On *Sherlock* Chinese people and culture prove too opaque for even the master of mystery to crack; yet on *Elementary* one of the first major signs of friendship between Holmes and Watson occurred when he first met her family and deduced

instantly how to explain to them the value of their daughter and sister's new vocation in the terms they would most appreciate and respect, demonstrating critical cosmopolitan crosscultural competency and a great deal of care for Watson ("The Leviathan").

In addition, women also function on *Sherlock* as unreadable and mysterious, and thus an absolute Other. This effect occurs several times, with Sherlock's constant misreading of coroner Molly Hooper's (Louise Brealey) romantic interest, overruling of Mrs. Hudson's insistence that she is not his housekeeper, initial inability to deduce that Watson's girlfriend is an assassin, and even failure to recognise his own sister. Yet this pattern becomes most explicit in the representation of Irene Adler (Lara Pulver). Her first meeting with Sherlock sets the tone when he finds his usually penetrating stare rebuffed by her naked female body ("A Scandal in Belgravia"). The screen echoes his perplexity, visualising Irene only as the question mark of absolute irresolvable mystery where otherwise an almost endless overflow of visually rendered information would appear (Figure 4). As if checking to make sure his brain isn't broken, Sherlock quickly turns to Watson and immediately a profusion of information covers his form, including his bare skin, emphasising that Irene's female body, not her nakedness, exceeds Sherlock's deductive ability (Figures 5 and 6). For this scene to function properly one must believe that Sherlock operates almost exclusively in an all-male world; women can only remain an absolute Other if they remain separate emotionally, socially, and spatially. In *Elementary* Watson becomes an unavoidable female presence who Holmes must relate to outside the fetishised realm of sex, in an innumerable array of daily exchanges. Watson thus cannot function as an endlessly unknowable cipher of femininity because their relationship and ability to solve crime together requires communication, mutual recognition, and trust. Watson becomes eminently, intimately knowable, both to Holmes and the viewer.



Figures 5 and 6: Watson (Martin Freeman) is "read" by Holmes in *Sherlock*, "A Scandal in Belgravia". BBC Wales, 1 Jan. 2012. Screenshots.

Notably, when Irene Adler (Natalie Dormer) emerges in *Elementary* she is also unreadable to Holmes. However, this is not because of her alien female opacity, but rather because love blinds Sherlock to the reality that Adler is merely a disguise for the master villain Moriarty. Thus, in the end Watson thwarts Adler/Moriarty by playing on the theme that love blinds even the strongest intellects equally, regardless of sex. In laying a successful trap for Adler/Moriarty that uses her love for Holmes against her, just as she had done to Holmes, Watson achieves a position of intellectual mastery vis-à-vis both geniuses. *Elementary* thus

resists simple gendering of sexual betrayal, emotionality, and mystique, leaving all people vulnerable to the human foibles that inhibit recognition of a beloved's faults. In the end, neither women nor love remain a mystery. Therefore, by positioning Watson, a woman of colour, as a point-of-view character, *Elementary* undermines the patriarchal, imperial notion that the female mind and Eastern cultures represent unknowable, absolute Otherness, and invite a critical cosmopolitan approach that creates openings for mutual recognition and empathy across difference, and invites viewers to see the city through many different eyes.

Conclusion: Sherlock and Joan in the Critical Cosmopolitan City

Thus, in conclusion, while the BBC's modern adaptation of Sherlock Holmes reproduces many of the politically problematic aspects of Conan Doyle's imperial city, *Elementary* cultivates an aesthetic of critical cosmopolitanism that centres quotidian interchange between the diverse people of the modern multicultural city, and mutual recognition of their shared humanity. Berlant describes empathy as the most radical political feeling because it requires intimate understanding of other people's daily experiences and pain and thus may be said to undermine the emotional and spatial isolation upon which imperial cosmopolitanism depends. *Elementary* is far from perfect, and it is worth noting that, like many critiques of cosmopolitanism, its protagonists are both from wealthy backgrounds, associating enlightened social attitudes with class privilege and its attendant mobility. Yet, at the same time, it is not through the exercise of hypermobility nor monetary power that *Elementary*'s Holmes and Watson construct a critical cosmopolitan approach to the city. Rather, it is by viewing the city from street level, and meeting every inhabitant of the city as a knowable fellow citizen that they are able to penetrate the most stubborn secrets of the modern metropole and, in the end, even those of the human heart.

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