New Academia: An International Journal of English Language, Literature and Literary Theory

(Online-ISSN 2347-2073) *(U.G.C. Journal. No. 44829)* **Vol. VII Issue III, July 2018**

Visible Body, Invisible Barrier - Failure of Visual Epistemology and Imagistic System of Signs in A. C. Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia"

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Abstract

Arthur Conan Doyle's stories often depict male criminals as perfect specimens of the criminal type. As with Colonel Sebastian Moran in "The Empty House", Professor Moriarty in "The Final Problem", Tonga in "The Sign of the Four" or Beppo in the "Adventure of the Six Napoleons" Conan Doyle suggests not only that the expert eye can discern traces of criminality in pathologized criminal bodies, but that such visible signals have evolved in nature as a means of imagistic semiotics. Visible phenomena thus constitute a more "natural," less mediated means of signification than language or speech or behavior in respect of detection. By the imagistic language of criminality Doyle corroborates the idea that criminality is an inborn rather than situational characteristic, and that criminal features are a "natural" rather than constructed visual code. But, based on this epistemology of visual criminality, which is at the same time racial, patriarchal and gender biased, Doyle's favourite incarnation, Holmes fails to conform to the female characters repeatedly in the series. "A Scandal in Bohemia" is an apt example of such a big failure of Holmes's, where he is outwitted by a well known adventuress, Irene Adler, for his compartmentalized Haeckelitian knowledge of criminality visible only in pathologized male body. Adherence to this ideological fixedness makes him (Holmes) along with two other principal male characters (Watson and the King) to repeatedly comment on Irene's feminine sexuality. At the turn-of-the –century this story participates in such large-scale shifts by emphasizing how identity categories such as "criminality" and "femininity" function— or don't function— as imagistic systems of signs. On the surface, the story privileges and celebrates the eye and the image to an unprecedented degree, but on another level, it manifests deep doubt about this

theory of visibility. The story's underlying ambivalence regarding visual epistemologies and imagistic meaning clusters around a series of problems related to the female criminal heroine. Thus Holmes's theory that crime and criminality are visually ascertainable categories, when subject to an expert gaze, comes into conflict with ideologies of domestic intactness and feminine concealment. This collision of values is most apparent in many stories about female criminals in Holmes narratives. That such narratives are at odds with the visible criminological semiotics at work, reveals the influential resonance of contemporary debates about criminality, interventionism, and feminist challenges to patriarchal social organization. In light of this above argument I want to see Adler as an emerging "New Woman" at the first wave of feminism in British fin-de-siecle.

KEY WORDS: *Anthropological criminology, Fin de siècle, Feminism, Gender and performance, Imagistic visuality, Invisible resistance, Historicized criminality, Masculinity, Photographic naturalness, Objective materialism, Ontological existence, Sexuality, Scientific realism, Visible body, etc.*

1. Introduction

In recent years, crime and criminality have been pervasive topics in studies of late-Victorian literature, but these studies have failed to recognize the distinctiveness of the female criminals as a narrative figure, often overlooking them altogether. There is a simple explanation for this omission: female criminals do not suit the dominant critical models and methodologies that have been brought to bear on crime narrative of the period. Much has been written, about criminal anthropology and criminal science's influence on late Victorian fiction. When we come to female criminals, however, this critical model simply doesn't work. In fin de siècle crime narrative, systematic or scientific efforts to explain, predict, or categorize female offenders typically fail, and the female criminal represents that which cannot be accounted for within modern systems of social control. Elizabeth C. Miller in her book , ***"Framed : The New Woman Criminal in British Culture at the Fin de Siecle"***, says : Detective series, crime films, and dynamite narratives invite readers to admire female criminals because of their ability to evade punishment, often by manipulating beauty, glamour, disguise, cross-dressing, or other visible, imagistic means. These female criminals are remarkably protean characters, employing bodily transformation to resist social controls. Insofar as we can read such characters as supporting a dominant cultural ideology, they promote a consumerist rather than a disciplinary theory of individual identity [1]. In light of her above statement, I am going to analyze the famous literary "New Woman" criminal Irene

Adler, in *"A Scandal in Bohemia"*, who outwits Holmes and evades his capture by masterfully transforming her image and orchestrating her visibility.

In 1891, Conan Doyle began publishing short detective stories about Sherlock Holmes in the Strand Magazine, a new and innovative periodical that established a distinctly visual narrative medium. Conan Doyle had already published two novels about Holmes, but the franchise only took off when packaged as a short fiction series began with this particular short story. The stories and the Strand were immediately and enormously popular, and a host of publications with similar content and format soon cropped up. In Britain, detective series thus emerged simultaneously with the mass-market illustrated monthly magazine, and the impact of the two cultural forms is virtually inseparable. Holmes's deepest cultural impact, however, was in many ways a specifically visual one. Conan Doyle provided his audience with an unusually visible fictional world. Many critics have discussed the "iconic" status of Holmes, the crystallization of his image in early theatrical and filmic productions, the accumulated visual detail in Conan Doyle's brand of realism, the stories' emphasis on observation and surveillance, Holmes's particularly visual mode of detection, and the author's own special interest in visual perception. Trained as a physician, Conan Doyle had received advanced preparation in ophthalmology, and as an eye specialist he was highly attuned to the human capacity for visual perception and misperception. It is hardly surprising, then, that the stories challenge the foundations of vision and knowledge amid a newly imagistic and consumerist cultural terrain; nor is it surprising that the stories exhibit, as a profound ambivalence about the image-centric culture that they seemingly showcase. Indeed, while many critics have argued that the Victorians inveterately privileged the visual, Kate Flint has identified a counter discourse that challenged "the sufficiency of the visible," arguing that the visual was "of paramount importance to the Victorians," yet also "a heavily problematised category". Such perceptive instability created a kind of "visual vertigo" in writers like Conan Doyle: he is powerfully attracted to the idea of visual semiotics, and palpably optimistic about the brave new world of visual technology, but often contradictory about how images make meaning (Miller 29-30).

Kate Flint's claim may be confirmed in support of the evidences from *"A Scandal in Bohemia"*. In this story the King of Bohemia's visit to Holmes is part of his attempt to suppress Adler's action against his upcoming marriage. The king entrusts Holmes to recover a photograph taken with Adler, lest some unwanted exposure of their past relationship upset his marriage plans with a Scandinavian princess. The king presents the case as an extremely important one that "may have an influence upon European History" (10). To the king, Adler is merely a jilted lover turned potential blackmailer, despite the fact that the king has cruelly wronged her. He took his betrayal for granted on the ground that she was socially not on his

level then, "I wish she had been on my station" (27), and now he wants her to be silenced about their relationship. To this end, many attempts, such as burglary, robbery, and illegal body search, have been made to secure the photo. The king's last resort is a consultation with Holmes. Holmes's immediate response was, "It is quite a pretty little problem" (13). Holmes gathers as much information as he desires for Miss Irene Adler -- that she is the daintiest thing under the bonnet on this planet, that she lives quietly, sings at concerts, drives out at five every day, and turns at seven sharp for dinner; seldom goes out at any other times, except when she sings; has a face that a man may die for, is recently courted by a handsome man (16-18). In fact, his notion of gender is not much different from the king's in that woman is essentially less intellectual than man and, therefore, properly under his direction, "women are naturally secretive, and they like to do their own secreting…I will not look…I will get her to show me [the photo]" (22). Relying on the assumptions of her gendered behavior, Holmes writes and directs a script for Adler in which she may expose where the photo is concealed, because more than once he had taken advantage of it, "In the case of the Darlington substitution scandal it was of use to me, and also in the Arnsworth Castle business. A married woman grabs at her baby and unmarried one reaches for her jewel box" (25). To this end a stage with a natural look is set accordingly when "it was already dusk, and the lamps were just being lighted" (21). Extras are hired: "There was a group of shabbily-dressed men smoking and laughing in a corner, a scissors-grinder with his wheel, two guardsmen who were flirting with a nurse-girl, and several well-dressed young men who were lounging up and down with cigars in their mouths" (21). They are also directed to create a little commotion when Adler arrives at her house. She is expected to play the role of heroine when "she stood at the top with her superb figure outlined against the lights of the hall, looking back into the street" (23). Holmes himself is disguised as a chivalrous clergyman and, when the commotion starts, pretends to get wounded while protecting her. Led to Adler's house for a rest, he gains an opportunity to closely observe her. Holmes supposes that she would secure the photo first when a false alarm of fire is issued with some smoke, a trick performed by Watson. Indeed, she is following Holmes's directives when she, unwittingly, reveals the whereabouts of the photo during the fire alarm. This moment encapsulates the performative aspect of gender that "the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives" [2]. By showing the photo's hiding spot, Adler seems to follow such directives and to prove Holmes's assumption about the female instinct, an instinct that women have less self-control and are more likely to betray themselves than men. His directives are based on the assumption, as he explains his trick to Watson, that "When a woman thinks that her house is on fire, her instinct is at once to rush to the thing which she values most" (25). Such an idea reflects the gender

stereotypes of the times. While self-control is one of the main qualities a man should have, it is the quality woman cannot attain, however hard her attempts. This insurmountable limitation is further articulated when Holmes stresses such action's naturalness, saying, "It is a perfectly over-powering impulse" (25). However, precisely because of this essentialist assumption of gender, Holmes fails to recover the photo [3].

Holmes's limited perception of gender blinds him to Adler's countermoves. Though inadvertently having betrayed the photo's location, Adler immediately realizes that she has fallen into his trap. In disguise, and having followed Holmes and confirmed on his real identity, she decides to leave England, along with the photo. Meanwhile, satisfied with her own detection of the photo, Holmes ceases to pay attention to her ensuing actions—those of closely watching and following him. Furthermore, his assumption makes him blind to Adler in a male costume. When this "slim youth in an ulster" talks to Holmes, he fails to recognize her (26). Even with the familiarity of her voice, he only wonders "who the deuce that could have been". Citing Judith Butler's seminal essay, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory", Younghee Kho says, this failure in detecting Adler's identity, a rare instance for Holmes, comes from his failure of perception on gender that what is seemingly the natural behavior of a particular sex is, in fact, "a set of corporeal styles" acquired from "sedimentation of gender norms" in society (Butler 524). According to Butler, gender is not a fixed identity that determines one's acts; instead, when such acts, manifest in "bodily gestures, movements, and enactments of various kinds," are repeated over time, they form particular styles in relation to the body (Butler 519). For Butler, gender is not an inborn but a socially constructed attribute. Ironically, Holmes's reasoning process unwittingly betrays the falsity of his assumptions on gender and supports Butler's point. His hypothesis is formed and justified by his past cases, such as "the Darlington Substitution Scandal" and "the Arnsworth Castle business," where he depended on the same theories and succeeded (25). However, his memory itself shows how certain gendered norms are imposed and deposited, and the link between his previous cases and the current one exemplifies how "a set of corporeal styles" are acquired from such "sedimentation" (Butler 524). Adler might have fulfilled Holmes's expectations when she ran for the photo in response to the fire alarm, but when she notices its falsity and chooses to follow Holmes in disguise, she makes it clear that her first act was merely acquired and practiced at the demand of society. Her following act of cross-dressing reveals gender to be a social construct (Kho 3).

2. Obsession with Visual Epistemology and Historicized Criminality

Now the question remains why Holmes, the most incisive reasoner and most energetic agent in Europe, with an encyclopedic knowledge in criminology does circumscribe criminality into a body? Despite the King's repeated warning about Irene's resoluteness in character, why does Holmes take her lightly? The answer lies in Holmes's denial of changing status of women's in compatible with the changing state of history. In the course of the story we find, the body is extolled as the location of a new, "scientific" form of identity, as Ronald Thomas has recently argued; Holmes, however, finds that female identity is easily detached from visually comprehensible bodily moorings (Miller 26). Doyle employs contemporary conceptions of crime and image in the Holmes stories, and the relentlessly visual logic of Holmes's procedures echoes contemporary scientific principles and practices. Of particular relevance here is the insistence on Holmes's professional objectivity, paralleling contemporary efforts to defense science in these terms. Since men are the born historians, "who were anxious to give it (history) a 'scientific' aspect…. We almost got the impression that accurate and well founded statements of facts, logically put together, was the ideal of historical writing", says Karl Pearson, who was a prominent eugenicist [4]. In 1894 he wrote in the Fortnightly Review: "Men of science are accustomed to do their own work in their own way without paying much attention to the movement of political or social thought outside the limits of their own little corner of the field of knowledge" ("Politics and Science" 140). Taking such a compartmentalization of historicized knowledge for granted was part of the burgeoning professionalism and scientific materialism of late-Victorian era, at the wake of Darwin's "The Origin of Species" (1859), which Holmes epitomizes. Upon first making his acquaintance, Dr. Watson, the series' narrator, is fascinated as much by Holmes's obliviousness as by his expertise: "His ignorance was as remarkable as his knowledge. Of contemporary literature, philosophy and politics he appeared to know next to nothing" ("Scarlet" 11). Quite obviously, this characterization of "the scientist" supports an ideology of professional objectivity by depicting scientific practice as detached from political or social motivation. Significantly, Holmes's objectivity was meant to be not only logical, but visual. Conan Doyle calls Holmes a "perfect . . . observing machine," and a "sensitive instrument" with "high power lenses" ("Scandal" 5). This depiction of Holmes as a microscope or telescope is furthered in other parts of the series: in "The Crooked Man," he is said to resemble "a machine rather than a man" (157), and in "The Greek Interpreter" he is described as "inhuman" (193). As Watson tells Holmes in "A Study in Scarlet": "you have brought detection as near an exact science as it ever will be brought in this world". Holmes's objective gaze enables his authority, and throughout the series, Watson and other characters

continue to be amazed by his feats of sight. At some point in each story, Holmes puts a person or thing "under the microscope" and explains how visual phenomena reveal far more of "the truth" than most people recognize. In "The 'Gloria Scott,'" for example, merely by looking at Mr. Trevor, Holmes deciphers that he has feared "a personal attack" in the last year, knows how to box, has done a lot of digging, has been in New Zealand and Japan, and so on (94– 95). Trevor responds: "What an eye you have!" (96). Holmes becomes less a microscope than an infrared device in "Charles Augustus Milverton": according to Watson, "Holmes had remarkable powers, carefully cultivated, of seeing in the dark" (166– 67). In "The Golden PinceNez," not only darkness but history itself succumbs to Holmes's penetrating gaze. As the story begins, he is "engaged with a powerful lens deciphering the remains of the original inscription upon a palimpsest" (218).

Although the stories celebrate Holmes's purportedly objective visual stance, his visual practice relies on assumptions grounded in late-Victorian criminology and anthropology, and his debt to pernicious racial theories is now only too apparent. Flint has argued that Victorian critics tended to "see" in visual art what they already "knew," revealing how the visual is mediated through "hidden forces of ideology" (166), and the same could be said for Holmes's tendency to see what he believes to be true about race. A key principle of early criminology, for example, was the nineteenth-century anthropological tenet that "ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny"—that the evolution and development of a species follows the same trajectory as the development of an individual organism within that species. By extension, this idea became foundational to theories of atavism and racial degeneration in scientific conceptions of criminality. Utilizing the metaphor of the human life-span— childhood, adulthood, and decline— to describe the evolution attained by various cultures and races, criminologists concluded that criminals who do not adhere to the behavioral norms of their society must be atavistic throwbacks to an earlier evolutionary stage (Miller 34). For his part, Holmes not only believes that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, he advocates the theory as his own invention: "I have a theory that the individual represents in his development the whole procession of his ancestors" ("Empty House" 23). Since Irene does not adhere to Holmes's long accepted criminology, neither in physical ("she has a face that a man may die for") nor in behaviourial norms, Holmes fails to take her into consideration seriously. The debt that Holmes owes to anthropological theories of racialized criminality is apparent throughout the series. Holmes's visual capacity as an observer, cataloger, and classifier of human and criminal "types" echoes the imperialist, "master-of-all-I-survey" gaze that Mary Louise Pratt describes in "Imperial Eyes"[5].

3. Misperception of Femininity as Feminine Sexuality

If the stories imagine race as a straightforwardly visible ontological category, gender proves to be far more protean. Indeed, while establishing the immediacy and authority of visual epistemology in terms of race and criminality, Conan Doyle's stories are uncertain when it comes to visualizing gender, sexuality, and femininity, and women often represent barricades to Holmes's visual methodology. In "The Greek Interpreter," as in other stories, Watson says that Holmes has an "aversion to women" (193), in most of his interactions with them, he appears merely inattentive. In The Sign of Four, for example, upon meeting Mary Morstan, Watson exclaims, "What a very attractive woman!" Turning to Holmes, Watson is met with indifference: "He had lit his pipe again and was leaning back with drooping eyelids. 'Is she?' he said languidly; 'I did not observe'" (17). That Holmes, an expert in seeing, did not "observe" Morstan seems remarkable, but Holmes's visual capacities are often not as effective with women as with men. Throughout the series, Holmes complains to Watson that women's inner lives are impossible to determine by their outward appearance: "the motives of women are so inscrutable. . . . Their most trivial action may mean volumes, or their most extraordinary conduct may depend upon a hair-pin or a curling-tongs" ("The Second Stain" 912). References to a "hair-pin" and "curling-tongs" indicate that part of women's inscrutability for Holmes has to do with their employment of imagistic transformation via beautification ritual. Women are not only more difficult for Holmes to read, but they often block his detection in active and passive, conscious and unconscious ways. There are many more such examples where Holmes's visual semiotic knowledge is thwarted in confrontation with female characters. However, the limited space of the article restricts me but to name them only. In "The Crooked Man" and "The Dancing Men", the wives of murdered men have nervous break downs and remain silent and inaccessible to Holmes throughout the stories. In the "Abbey Grange", a wife again proves useless as a witness or source of information, concerning husband's murder, but in this case she lying rather than cataleptic. Similarly, in "The Musgrave Ritual", a woman whose former fiancé has been killed presents an inscrutable obstacle to Holmes's investigation. In all these cases women's bodies provide no useful information for Holmes: their enigmatic physicality hinders his investigations.

Conan Doyle's female characters continually represent enigmatic texts; their uncooperative bodies counteract and challenge the idea that visual vestiges of crime and criminality are immediate, patent, and obvious. Immediate, unmediated knowledge that derives from careful visual apprehension seemingly abounds in "A Scandal in Bohemia," but in the course of the narrative, Irene Adler interrupts and challenges Holmes's visual

methodology. Frances Gray claims that she "offers an endless destabilization and disruption of what seems fixed" [6]. As I stated at the onset, I wanted to focus specifically on Adler's employment of feminized visual spectacle to elude Holmes's eye. At the beginning of the story, Holmes's visual authority is established not only in that he is compared to a microscope, but through his expert apprehension of other people. Though his client chooses to hide his identity behind a mask and use a false name, Holmes sees through his disguise. After Holmes calls him "your Majesty," the King of Bohemia "with a gesture of desperation . . . [tears] the mask from his face".The central predicament of the case revolves round the primacy of visual knowledge: the king's former lover, Adler, possesses a photograph of the two together, and he fears she will blackmail him on the eve of his impending marriage. Holmes treats photography in this case as a fetishized or idealized form of reality and an utterly transparent window into history. His conversation with the king presumes the superiority of imagistic signification over writing: "If this young person should produce her letters for blackmailing or other purposes, how is she to prove their authenticity?" The king responds,

> "There is the writing."
> "Pooh, pooh! Forgery."
> "My private note-paper."
> "Stolen."
> "My own seal."
> "Imitated."
> "My photograph."
> "Bought."
> "We were both in the photograph."
> "Oh, dear! That is very bad! Your Majesty has indeed committed an indiscretion.""

If the past was once a forgeable document, this passage suggests that in the age of photography, it is an inexorable force. André Bazin, an early theorist of film, argued in his influential 1945 essay "The Ontology of the Photographic Image" that photographs make the object they depict more real. He claimed that "The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of space and time that govern it", and that "Only the impassive lens . . . is able to present [its object] in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love" [7]. Holmes's treatment of photography in this story anticipates a Bazinian philosophy of images: photography "purifies" reality by emptying it of contextual material. It is an incorruptible entity because it is a pristinely visual one. At the end of the story, Holmes requests a photograph of Adler— alone in an evening dress— as his reward

from the king. Watson treats this image as a surrogate for Adler herself, and he is right, since in Barthes's language "the image is re-presentation, which is to say ultimate resurrection" [8]: "when [Holmes] speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honourable title of the woman" (29). There is no separation between Adler the woman and Adler, the *iconic* image here, as though by acquiring her photograph Holmes somehow acquires her. Since Adler outwits and eludes Holmes in this case, his possession of her image can be viewed as a surrogate means of "apprehending" her.

To Holmes, Adler is not only memorable because she outwits him, but because she embodies something distinctively womanly. Referring to her, he subsumes her whole identity into womanliness, as though "woman" signifies that which he can't account for:

> To Sherlock Holmes she is always the woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex. It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise, but admirably balanced mind. . . . And yet there was but one woman to him, and that woman was the late Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable memory. (5)

Watson continues to refer to Adler in such terms, but in this initial description he also offers assurance that she is no longer a social threat: reference to her death dulls the menace that she poses from the opening lines of the story. Similarly, at the end of the story, Conan Doyle reprivatizes Adler's public body, nestling her in conventional domesticity via marriage "as an angel in the house". When she marries Godfrey Norton, a lawyer "of the Inner Temple," she enters the impermeable domestic sanctum where femininity is contained and concealed . Adler's ability to burrow into such a position, despite her "dubious" public reputation, suggests that the coverage of domesticity not only "protects" women from public danger, it also imparts to them the means of secreting and manipulating public perception.This has a broader sociopolitical relevance: as women gain more public access on the crest of first-wave feminism, the story suggests, they bring to public culture a proclivity for privateness, veiling, and secreting, dismantling the association between "publicity" and "openness." As a character, Adler suggests that the visual, bodily language of gender and femininity paradoxically becomes more important as feminism provides women greater public access. By means of cross-dressing, Adler eludes Holmes's visual system of detection, but throughout the story her behavior enacts a complicated semiotics of visibility and invisibility, highlighting her mastery of public displays and concealments of self. She has learned this skill, perhaps, through her career as an actress: she is a public celebrity who has learned to exist under cover from the public eye. The king calls her "the well-known adventuress," and assumes her "name is no doubt familiar." Adler is a woman in public circulation, existing,

promiscuously, at a level beyond intimate acquaintance. Indeed, Holmes is familiar with more than her name: his files record her birthdate, birthplace, and other facts concerning her identity (12). Despite the fact that her life is in public circulation, Adler masterfully retains control of her physical image (Miller 50). At the end of the story, she leaves a note for Holmes explaining how she outwitted him:

> Male costume is nothing new to me. I often take advantage of the freedom which it gives. I sent John, the coachman, to watch you, ran upstairs, got into my walking clothes, as I call them, and came down just as you departed. . . . I followed you to your door. . . . Then I, rather imprudently, wished you good-night" (28).

With the change, she not only shows her awareness of gender's "performative fluidity" but also appropriates it on her terms (Butler 528). In men's clothing, she mimics Holmes as a detective, a profession usually considered within the male purview. She further anticipates what steps he will take and escapes from his influence. While she may not be able to change the social structure in which her male counterparts write, direct, and redirect female behaviors, she is able to walk out of the male script by a temporary transgressive act. Her cross-dressing signifies her change of role from a passive receptacle of male directives to an active performer with her own will. Adler calls her drag outfit "walking clothes," which, as Joseph Kestner notes, suggests that a male identity allows Adler a public, peripatetic freedom otherwise unavailable to her. Even on the metalevel of the story's publication, she retains control over her image: though the story has several pictures of Adler, none show her in a putatively "true" state. We see her crossed-dressed and veiled, but never in a "natural" condition. The story makes no mention of a veil in Adler's wedding, and Holmes does not give a single description of her to Watson when he recounts his experience of performing witness to the marriage scene. We have no undisguised, unmediated picture of the "real" Adler, casting doubt on the idea that such pictures exist at all (Miller 51).

4. Conclusion

While at the outset, the story seems to propose that visual, imagistic signification is more authentic or truthful than the spoken or written word; later depicting Irene, it suggests that vision has its own failures as a means of knowing the world. As a matter of fact, Doyle's treatment of race and criminality usually reveals how Holmes prioritizes visuality mediated knowledge. Such knowledge continually fails Holmes in his interaction with Irene Adler, who is perhaps the most obvious example of his visual limitations. She is beautiful and in no way adheres to the "criminal type," despite being an "adventuress" who threatens to blackmail the King of Bohemia. Indeed, her appearance does not match her behavior in any of the ways others expect. From the king's first description of Adler, the story emphasizes

that her outward display of femininity conceals an inward rejection of the norms of feminine behavior: "She has the face of the most beautiful of women and the mind of the most resolute of men" (14). The disjunction between Adler's "face" and "mind"—between her performance and internalization of gender— is what allows her to outwit Holmes. Watson's conclusion to the story reveals that Adler remains a fixture in Holmes's imagination, as the adversary who "beat" him, long after the case is closed:

> And that was how a great scandal threatened to affect the kingdom of Bohemia, and how the best plans of Mr. Sherlock Holmes were beaten by a woman's wit. He used to make merry over the cleverness of women, but I have not heard him do it of late (29).

Adler "beats" Holmes, as we have seen, by manipulating outward visual codes of gender. When Holmes meets the cross-dressed Adler on the street, her voice is familiar but he fails to recognize her image:

> We had reached Baker Street, and had stopped at the door. He was searching his pockets for the key, when some one passing said: "Good night, Mister Sherlock Holmes." There were several people on the pavement at the time, but the greeting appeared to come from a slim youth in an ulster who had hurried by. "I've heard that voice before," said Holmes, staring down the dimly lit street. "Now, I wonder who the deuce that could have been." (26)

In this scene, we witness the failure of Holmes's reliance on visual means of knowledge. He recognizes Adler's voice, but cannot see through her disguise. Adler is identified as "someone passing," but she is passing in more ways than he is aware. Her disguise provides no visible hint that the "slim youth" is Adler or even that "he" is a woman. Adler's disguise suggests, quite obviously, the extent to which outward displays of gender can be manipulated and faked: public, visual markers of gender are not a "natural" expression of innate subjectivity.

W. J. T. Mitchell has used the Wittgensteinian concept of the "duck-rabbit picture" to describe "dialectical" or "multistable" images that seem to perfectly accommodate two or more mutually exclusive interpretations (Miller 26). Following this notion, we might "read" Holmes's failure of detecting Irene in a male costume as an allegory of imagistic ambiguity. Holmes, the expert eye, finds his visual acumen continually thwarted by the female body's resistance to interpretation. It suggests the diffculty of interpreting the world through visual apprehension, or the fundamental inconsistency between imagistic and linguistic modes of representation, or the inevitable change of meaning that occurs when the visual is mediated through language. Without the words of the story, one would never know the walker is a woman. Indeed, as an image and as a literary figure, Adler's identity is radically double. In

the "linguistic" version of this trailing scene, she passes by before Holmes can figure out who she is: she is Baudelaire's *passante*, the desirable but fleeting woman of the modern city who disappears before one can grasp her. Meanwhile, in the "imagistic" version of the scene, she is a criminal or cruising young man whom the other men appear to flee. Like the duck-rabbit, she is predator or prey, depending on how we the reader look at her (Miller 26). Doyle does not explain why he has made Adler at once so appalling and so appealing. Initially he takes her as a potentially threatening woman and normalizes her by providing justification for her actions and presenting her at the end of the story as a loyal and loving wife. But from the beginning of the story he goes on to present her as an object of public desire, idolization, and glamorization. Her glamorous and unspecifically criminal past give her the potential of the figure, increasingly visible in both English and Russian popular literature of the fin de siècle, whose sexual freedom and opposition to the social order posit a double danger. Her presence in the disputed photograph is her own way of inscribing her identity into a situation which does not hesitate to erase inconvenient women, her success in retaining it is a way of ensuring that there will be no corpse in her story, and a powerful, and, perhaps, a warning to the powerful world of Bohemia that such corpses cannot be hidden with impunity. Her story is political as well as personal, and she offers a chance not only to reading a simplistic reading of female desire but also to reconfigure history at the turn of the century.

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*****Acknowledgement**

While writing this article, I had to heavily rely on Elizabeth C. Miller and Younghee Kho. Their seminal works confirmed what I merely speculated at the beginning when I took this project. At many places I could not avoid the temptation of nearly quoting them, but

painstaking effort has also been taken to cite them legitimately with proper links, which may be verified from the "citations". Apart from them the books, which aroused my keen desire to take a critical look at what seems to be merely a story of detection, and which I consulted several times at a very random fashion, have been mentioned in "reference", but they don't come with a number.