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23 August 2020

Words: 7652

Professor Moriarty and Sherlock Holmes's "Queer" Relationship

An Alternative to Binary Thinking

Abstract

“Queering” is an alternative to the binary thinking that has favored and reinforced a heterosexual hierarchy through norms of sexuality, power dynamics, and morality. This thesis argues that Professor Moriarty, and Sherlock Holmes’s relationship “queers” and illustrates that “queering” can replace rigid dichotomies as exemplified in “The Final Problem” by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (2011) and the complementary pastiche “Obsession” by Russel D. McLean (2015). Queer theories are used to challenge heterosexual norms and deconstruct three binary oppositions. The first chapter deconstructs the heterosexuality/homosexuality dichotomy by discussing how Moriarty’s same-sex desire for Holmes challenges heteronormativity. The professor’s admiration for Sherlock’s intellectual ability results in Moriarty accepting the detective as an equal. Next, the queer sadomasochist tone that characterizes their relationship is discussed as an indicator of Moriarty and Sherlock’s equal amount of control over one another. This demonstrates that neither fully experiences the absence of power in the power/powerlessness opposition. Turning to moral judgment the acceptability of the professor and detective’s “queering” relationship is examined in relation to good/evil. “Queer” has to remain a scene of contestation and applies to other norms and dichotomies as well such as masculinity/femininity and trusting/suspicious.

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Introduction

Since 1973 homosexuality is no longer defined as a mental illness in the DSM-IV, *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2013). However, the rigid heterosexuality/homosexuality dichotomy is still used to categorize sexualities on a degree of acceptability that is based on heterosexual norms. Sherlock Holmes's sexuality, for instance, has been under debate since Sir Arthur Conan Doyle created his detective series in the Victorian era. More recently, the discussion does not just include Conan Doyle's texts, but also pastiches and film adaptations dedicated to Holmes. Research on modern adaptations has questioned whether Sherlock can be read as a queer character. In particular, producers from the popular BBC adaptation *Sherlock* (2010) have denied this possibility. Professor Moriarty, on the other hand, has been more accepted as a non-heterosexual character. Interestingly, Moriarty has been described as Sherlock's mirror image. This makes it arguable why these critics believe the professor can be read as queer but Sherlock is not allowed to identify as non-heterosexual. One main difference between these two characters is that Moriarty commits the crimes that Sherlock solves. Therefore, moral judgment should be taken into consideration because when Moriarty commits a crime he opposes society's norms. "Queer" also challenges society's norms but these are often related to gender and sexuality such as heteronormativity. Contrarily, Holmes as a detective resembles a protector of society and its norms and is therefore interpretable as supporting heteronormativity. While heteronormativity aims to divide Sherlock and Moriarty by reinforcing the hierarchy in binary oppositions such as heterosexuality/homosexuality, power/powerlessness, and good/evil. This thesis argues that exploring "The Final Problem" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (2011) and the complementary pastiche "Obsession" by Russel D. McLean (2015), Professor Moriarty and Sherlock Holmes's relationship "queers" and as such suggests an alternative to binary thinking in terms of sexuality, power dynamics, and morality.

When addressing “queering,” it is important to acknowledge the history of “queer” because the concept has had different meanings since its invention. Initially, “queer” was used to refer to a thing as being unusual, strange, or odd (Cambridge Dictionary 2020). However, since the 1920s “queer” was adopted as a derogatory slur to insult effeminate gay men (Bristow 195). Consequently, “queer” became a part of the heterosexual/homosexual binary opposition. However, in the 1990s Queer Nation, an LGBTQ activist organization, strived to reclaim “queer” as an inclusive term for sexual identities that differ from the heterosexual norm (Blackburn et al. 13; Bristow 195). This reclamation remains controversial because past experiences with “queer” being directed to people as an insult have resulted in an aversion of self-identifying with that term. However, others within the LGBTQIA+ community proudly identify as queer. This political movement of the LGBTQIA+ community has also created academic interest which resulted in the emergence of queer theory.

According to David M. Halperin “queer” as conceptualized in queer theory is the opposite of heteronormativity. He states that “queer” has always been “whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (qtd. in Caro Lancho 62). It provides many possibilities for “reordering the relations among sexual behaviours, erotic identities, constructions of gender, forms of knowledge [and] regimes of enunciation” (62).

Furthermore, Judith Butler claims that: “Power operates through the production of a binary frame for talking and thinking about gender and sexuality” (Burkitt 485).

Heterosexual/homosexual is one of these binary oppositions and its power resides in the regulation of what is deemed by society as acceptable behavior. Blackburn et al. state that this acceptable behavior is known as social norms (14-15). Concerning the heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy, the power is regulated by heteronormativity. “Queer” is defined as disrupting norms that are related to sexual identities. Therefore “queering,” the

application of queer theory by challenging heteronormativity, can be read as a demonstration of power itself.

However, this power of “queering” provides an alternative approach to binary thinking within sexuality but, as this study hopes to demonstrate, it can also be applied outside of sexuality. The decision to focus on the concept of “queering” in the progressive form has been made because the current meaning of “queer” is not necessarily its final meaning. Judith Butler suggests that:

If the term “queer” is to be a site of collective contestation, the point of departure for a set of historical considerations and futural imaginings, it will have to remain that which is, in the present, never fully owned, but always and only redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage and in the direction of urgent and expanding political purposes. This also means that it will doubtless have to be yielded in favour of terms that do that political work more effectively. Such a yielding may well become necessary in order to accommodate – without domesticating – democratizing contestations that have and will redraw the contours of the movement in ways that can never be fully anticipated in advance. (qtd. in Bristow 195)

The aforementioned history of “queer” showcases how its meaning continues to change. This allows “queer” to progress and thus move with the political movements it supports. For example, “queer” has become an inclusive umbrella term in the LGBTQIA+ community but it has also moved onto challenging heterosexual social norms. This thesis aims to build upon the previous movements of “queer.” In this case study, each chapter portrays a change that “queer” went through and provides a concise academic framework to deconstruct one binary opposition. A close reading of Sherlock and Moriarty’s relationship is used to examine their “queering” throughout the stories. Chapter 1 discusses the deconstruction of the

heterosexual/homosexual dichotomy based on Moriarty and Sherlock's disruption of heteronormativity. This questions the same sexual dichotomy "queer" as an effeminate gay slur used to be a part of. Chapter 2 focuses on power/powerlessness following Butler who argues that "queer" and heteronormativity are intertwined with social norms that hold power. This chapter deconstructs power dynamics by examining the sadomasochism (SM) undertones between Moriarty and Sherlock. SM illustrates how the reclamation of "queer" has resulted in a theory that further challenges heteronormative power relations. Chapter 3 debates moral judgment in terms of good/evil by considering how Sherlock and Moriarty's relationship is viewed as socially unacceptable. This showcases the applicability of "queer" in binary oppositions that are outside of sexuality because "queer" remains a progressive site of contestation. Lastly, a conclusion reconsiders the professor and detective's "queering" and discusses how the concept can be used for future research.

It is important to note that "The Final Problem" and "Obsession" share the same timeline and mirror one another's storyline. For instance, in "The Final Problem" John Watson provides an account on Sherlock's behalf to inform the public about what led up to the detective's death at Reichenbach Falls. However, in "Obsession," Alienist, Professor Moriarty's psychiatrist, narrates his interactions with the criminal before Moriarty follows Sherlock to Reichenbach Falls and dies in the detective's embrace. In this analysis, both works are discussed as one story because it eliminates a hierarchy favoring one narrative over the other. Therefore, it is in line with the deconstructive aspect of this study where despite and because of their similarity and dissimilarity both Sherlock and Moriarty's accounts are of equal value.

Chapter 1: Heterosexuality/Homosexuality

This chapter discusses how Moriarty and Sherlock's intellectual compatibility allows them to engage with one another on a deeper level. The analysis focuses on the erotic subtext and touches upon the characters' power dynamic that deviates from heteronormative behavior.

A form of heteronormativity is which sex and/or genders come to mind when thinking of a romantic relationship. Melena Gustavson argues that “[H]eterosexuality consists not only in a binary gendered order, but more importantly in the performance of normality” (410). For instance, in biblical stories it is often the reproductivity of a man and woman that results in a relationship. The bible portrays conventional gender roles and they are viewed as natural or normal because an opposite-sex couple can continue God's work of procreation. A marriage is initially associated with a heterosexual romance because of society's influence in reinforcing heterosexuality as the norm. Similarly, a love affair is first thought of as a married man who has a relationship with an unmarried woman. The image of a married man being with an unmarried man is created through context and thus can be secondary to the heteronormative one.

However, a reason that a mental image of a homosexual or lesbian couple is not dominant can also be derived from a Victorian thought-process. Victorians invented these terms of sexuality as the opposite of heterosexuality (Furieux 769). This means that homosexuality and lesbianism were perceived as the absence of heterosexual desire and behavior. Furthermore, some scholars debate that Victorian literature featuring same-sex desire demonstrates how Victorians struggled to express non-heterosexual identities (771). However, William Cohen argues that this “unspeakability” provided Victorian writers with many “opportunities to develop an elaborate discourse – richly ambiguous, subtly coded, prolix and polyvalent” (qtd. in Furieux 772). This form of representation is creative but limited because Victorian society continued to reinforce heterosexual imagery as the norm.

While heterosexual relationships were openly portrayed through courtships and marriages.

Non-heterosexual relationships had to rely on ambiguous text and allusions in literature.

The aforementioned Victorian use of ambiguous dialogue is not unfamiliar to Conan Doyle. Michael Crowe argues in his analysis of the Sherlock Holmes stories that many sudden changes of perception, known as Gestalt shifts, appear in “The Final Problem” (105-07). Crowe mentions that “a Gestalt shift happens when one first experiences an image or entity in one way and then in a quite different way” (1). He mentions that Conan Doyle’s texts carry a lot of meaning even if perceptual changes are less obvious. For instance, Crowe describes the tone of Moriarty and Sherlock’s first encounter as having a “gentlemanly character of two friends sitting down for a game of chess, whereas the reality is that each is hoping to bring on the death of the other” (105). He states that the Victorian reader familiar with Conan Doyle’s work can interpret what is left unsaid. For example, in the previous quote, it is when Sherlock puts a gun on the table that the reader knows it is a dangerous setting rather than a friendly one.

According to Carlen Lavigne, this interpretability of subtext is also present in the BBC adaptation, *Sherlock* (2010). The subtext shows the viewers that Moriarty is seducing Holmes. She notes that there is ample evidence of their flirtatious relationship as “[t]he homoeroticism latent in the notion of Holmes and Moriarty as potential puzzle-solving soul mates is exacerbated by Moriarty’s consistently seductive language” (20). An example is Moriarty using the voices of other people, preferably women, to talk to Sherlock and tell him that they are made for one another (19). She establishes that Moriarty can be read as being non-heterosexual as he overtly initiates the male-male seduction. Whereas Sherlock could also be read as having an asexual orientation as he is the recipient and does not explicitly express his desires to be with anyone sexually or romantically. Both characters are identifiable as “queer” because their behavior defies heteronormativity.

However, the producers of *Sherlock* (2010) have openly refused to agree with fans that Holmes could be “queer.” Melissa Caro Lancho suggests that the reason for this rejection is that Conan Doyle’s short stories do not lend themselves well to a homoerotic reading of Holmes and Watson’s relationship (2). Caro Lancho argues that Holmes’s masculine performativity in the canon is “queer” because he disrupts heteronormativity but she states that it is not explicitly homoerotic. She believes that there are two reasons why the producers would not openly display a homosexual romance between Watson and Holmes. One of them is that some readers and viewers have been known to reject the idea of the pair as being gay (14-16). But this chapter argues that a close reading of Sherlock and Moriarty’s relationship in Conan Doyle’s “The Final Problem” and McLean’s complementary pastiche “Obsession” actually shows evidence of an erotic subtext that is filled with same-sex desire.

The first encounter between Sherlock and Moriarty suggests that the sexually charged tension between them is unfamiliar but exciting. The detective admits that Moriarty’s presence is different from his usual interactions with criminals “My nerves are fairly proof, Watson, but I must confess to a start when I saw the very man who had been so much in my thoughts standing there on my threshold” (Doyle 289). Sherlock is excited to tell his best friend about professor Moriarty and it sounds like he is talking about a crush. Sherlock even goes into great detail to describe the professor’s physical appearance (289). To the same degree, the professor’s remarks playfully mock Sherlock’s intelligence. Moriarty is the first to take a jab at Sherlock’s intellect by deducing that the detective has a gun in his pocket “You have less frontal development than I should have expected” (289). Sherlock and Moriarty’s society is portrayed as having a lower level of understanding than the pair. This is evident from Sherlock’s reputation as Alienist admiringly narrates that “[Sherlock] has emerged as a unique and quite brilliant eccentric in our country’s consciousness ... He is a marvel of the modern age and ... the pinnacle of man’s intellectual evolution” (McLean 149). Holmes is

placed on a pedestal because he uses deductive reasoning to solve crimes. Sherlock, in turn, shows the same admiration for Moriarty as he calls him “a genius, a philosopher, an abstract thinker ... he has a brain of the first order” (Conan Doyle 287).

Sherlock is highly interested in Moriarty because they have the same deducing reasoning ability that allows them to foresee each other’s strategic moves (290). Both claim to know which thoughts have crossed one another’s mind and the tension is palpable. Crowe interprets this tone as “gentlemanly” and no different from playing a friendly game except for the fact that they want to kill one another (105). However, the only person grasping for a gun is Sherlock when he sees the professor reach into a pocket (Conan Doyle 290). The detective feels more at ease when he realizes that Moriarty grabbed a notebook. The professor uses his notes to discuss all the times' Sherlock was an inconvenience to him. Although it sounds more like Moriarty is reciting cherished diary entries. Moriarty views Sherlock as a nuisance for inconveniencing him. However, the professor’s interest is also peaked because he cannot mentally overpower Sherlock. It is this realization that Sherlock intellectually stands out as “queer” from the societal norm that arouses Moriarty because he recognizes himself in the detective. Their interaction turns heated when discussing the possibility of Moriarty losing his freedom due to Sherlock’s meddling in the professor’s life:

“Have you any suggestion to make” [Sherlock] asked. “You must drop it, Mr. Holmes,” said he, swaying his face about. “You really must you know.” “After Monday,” said [Sherlock]. “Tut, tut!” said he. “I am quite sure that a man of your intelligence will see that there can be but one outcome to this affair. It is necessary that you should withdraw. You have worked things in such a fashion that we have only one resource left. It has been an intellectual treat to me to see the way in which you have grappled with this affair, and I say, unaffectedly, that it would be a grief to me to be forced to take any extreme measure. You

smile, sir, but I assure you that it really would.” “Danger is part of my trade,” [Sherlock] remarked. “This is not danger,” said he. “It is inevitable destruction.” (290-91)

According to Caro Lancho, Conan Doyle’s stories do not offer overt homoeroticism between Watson and Sherlock (2). Their relationship might not be homoerotic but Moriarty and Sherlock’s relationship in “The Final Problem” is. Therefore, the latter has more in common with *Sherlock* (2010). Because the subtext implies in both the story and film adaptation that Moriarty and Sherlock’s “competition takes the form of romantic flirtation” (Lavigne 20). The Cambridge Dictionary defines an “affair” as “a matter or situation that causes strong public feeling, usually of moral disapproval” but also as “a sexual relationship, especially a secret one” (2020). Interestingly, the polyvalence of Moriarty’s use of “affair” within this sexual context is rather “queer” as it defies the social norm in both interpretations. A secret sexual relationship with Sherlock would defy the heterosexual norm. Especially, Moriarty’s openness in discussing their homoerotic arrangement is exciting. However, society disapproves of openly talking about and having a same-sex affair. Holmes is not faced by this danger of moral disapproval or the destruction Moriarty alludes to. He is smiling at the effect he has on the professor. Moriarty compliments Sherlock as he calls him “An intellectual treat” which implies that Sherlock fulfills Moriarty’s desires (Conan Doyle 291). Moriarty’s feelings are so extreme that he would feel grief if he has to take drastic measures against Holmes. That Moriarty admits these feelings of possible remorse to the person he is obsessed with further establishes an intimate connection between them.

However, the professor only explicitly voices his inner needs to Alienist when he says “[H]elp ... me overcome this obsession. Help me to see that this Sherlock Holmes is, as all other men, beneath me in intellect and capability. Help me to forget him” (McLean 150). It becomes evident from Moriarty’s account of his encounter with Sherlock, written in a letter to

Alienist, that the detective is unlike other men. Moriarty does not wish to accept Sherlock as his equal. Instead, a fatal attraction has taken over as the professor says “I am consumed by the desire to have [Sherlock] admit his inferiority; to force him to bow down to a superior intellect” (156). Sherlock deviates from the norm that Moriarty has set for how other men ought to act in his presence. The professor is taken aback by Sherlock’s deviant behavior because the detective does not submit to him. This challenges Moriarty’s display of dominance because he openly admits to having leverage over others such as Jack the Ripper, hitmen, Sebastian, Alienist, and Alienist’s wife (146-59).

Moriarty plays with Alienist’s mind in particular when the professor says that he is “not asking for [Alienist’s] subservience or obedience” (150). A reason for Moriarty to say this is because there is no need for him to ask people for their subservience as it is expected. Sherlock, on the other hand, needs to be pursued and this entices Moriarty. The professor wants to hear Sherlock admit out loud that he is intellectually and sexually beneath him. The same-sex desire in this Victorian short story relies on the ambiguity of for instance “to force someone to bow down to them” as the imagery is reminiscent of sadomasochistic tones (156). Moriarty claiming to be superior and wanting to come to terms with his hidden desires showcases his “queer” sexuality while he challenges the “sexual unspeakability” of the Victorian era (McLean 149; Cohen as qtd. in Furneaux 771-72).

Sherlock and Moriarty are defined as considerably standing out from Victorian society yet they are also known as each other’s mirror image. As Moriarty states “We are flip sides of the same coin, I fear. He is the only one in this godforsaken world who may match my own intellect. And yet he chooses to ally himself with tradition and order” (McLean 152-53). The Cambridge dictionary defines the aforementioned idiom as two things that look different even though they are very connected (2020). Furthermore, when reversing this idiom it would involve two people that are very different although they seem closely related. Both

perspectives are of equal applicability to Moriarty and Sherlock's relationship. For instance, Alienist boldly confronts Moriarty and claims that the professor hates Sherlock and needs to acknowledge those feelings "You hate anyone you see as a challenge, as an obstacle, as an equal" (McLean 157). Thus, when the preference of similarity over difference is reconsidered "equal" is at the center of the same coin idiom. Moreover, this "equality" is what Moriarty struggles to accept because he is used to celebrating his "queer" differences from society. His feelings towards Sherlock challenge Moriarty to let go of his privilege of thriving as being the other in society. It is not their sameness and difference that affects them the most even though Holmes embodies the righteousness that Moriarty wants to taunt. What unnerves Moriarty is the knowledge that Sherlock is his intellectual equal and soulmate. This is also evident when Moriarty tells Alienist that "the idea that there is someone in this world who is my equal? Oh, when you believe yourself unique, the prospect is terrifying" (153-57).

The intimacy between Sherlock and Moriarty is based on their admiration for one another's intellect and their ability to play on a deeper level with an underlying tone of same-sex desire. This same-sex desire does not follow the heteronormative dominant/submissive power dynamic because Sherlock refuses to obey Moriarty and back down. Therefore, they have to accept each other as their equal which defies the heterosexual/homosexual opposition and is "queer." They are engaged in a duel that is often perceived as being rooted in an underlying dichotomy of good/evil. The following chapter, therefore, examines the morality that is hidden within the power/powerlessness binary opposition and explores in what ways Moriarty and Sherlock's relationship deviates from conventional norms.

Chapter 2: Power/Powerlessness

This chapter builds upon the sexual undertones between Moriarty and Sherlock as discussed in the first chapter and explores how power/powerlessness is established within their relationship, a relationship which may be understood as sadomasochistic in nature.

According to Michel Foucault, SM is “a process of invention” that involves an “acting out of power structures by a strategic game that is able to give sexual pleasure or bodily pleasure” (qtd. in Bristow 169). Furthermore, Foucault argues against the assumed notion that the master in this game exercises full control over the slave and that this dynamic would establish an unequal display of power. Conversely, he draws upon the play between domination and subordination and how:

SM turns those binary power differences against themselves by allowing participants in this ‘strategic game’ to take control of the erotic charge factored into domination and subordination. Since this is a ‘game’ with agreed rules, the ‘slave’ is not really a slave or the ‘master’ not really a master. In such situations, the masochist or ‘bottom’ is often thought to command more power than the sadist or ‘top’ precisely because the ‘bottom’ controls the moment when the punishments have to stop. Apologists for SM insist that expressly consensual sexual practices of this kind involve complex exchanges of erotic power that may well be unintelligible to outsiders. (Bristow 169)

To illustrate, SM exemplifies unconventional power relations because it is unlike reproductive sex where a man/woman dichotomy is in place. A woman is expected to be submissive and even passive during reproductive sex while the man takes charge. One dominant lack of communication during this form of intercourse is for the woman to not voice her desires because female orgasm is not seen as a priority. Furthermore, this topic is also taboo in strongly religious societies and this is beneficial for a patriarchal system.

Judith Butler also discusses these power relations but through the concept of gender performativity (Yaghoubi-Notash et al. 308-09). Butler focuses on (the lack of) discourse and explores how language is used to assign gender roles. Furthermore, the repetition of acts of gender complies with the dominant discourse of society which is categorized as normal. This dominant discourse is persistent in maintaining a patriarchal system to reinforce male privilege in places such as the workforce, politics, and the household. For instance, male privilege in the bedroom is that the woman's needs are less important and the purpose is solely for the man to impregnate her. Thus, in this example gender performativity reinforces the heteronormativity of a woman's submission and a man's unquestioned control so the relationship does not risk moral disapproval.

Furthermore, Judith Fathallah argues that Moriarty's "queer" behavior in *Sherlock* (2010) challenges the detective's performed hegemonic masculinity. Her research focuses on Moriarty's nondominant and peculiar textual moments onscreen even when he is physically absent. Fathallah characterizes these moments of physical absence as acts of "straight" or "queer" performativity in postmodern male identity (494-95).

Absence in "The Final Problem" has also been examined by Michael Atkinson concerning the lack of explicitness in the text and Moriarty's minimal physical presence (141). Atkinson argues that Moriarty's signature is that he is an invisible criminal mastermind (143). Conan Doyle's usual formula for solving cases has been inverted in "The Final Problem." This formula often includes Sherlock (or Watson) being approached by a client to fix their problem. Secondly, Sherlock controls the situation as he examines the evidence at the crime scene and creates a plan of attack. He expects Watson, the client, and the police to follow his lead. Lastly, Sherlock demonstrates his deducing ability and is praised by the people around him when he solves the case and locks up the culprit (144). However, in "The Final Problem," Holmes is panicked rather than calm and seeks Watson's comfort while they

await the last days until Moriarty will be incarcerated by the police. Holmes explains to Watson that Moriarty matches his intellect. So the professor knows everything about the plan to lock him up. Therefore, it is Sherlock who has to fear for his life when Moriarty tells him to drop the case. Instead, Holmes and Watson try to escape to Europe. Understandably so because Sherlock is no longer in control as the crime-solver. Instead, Sherlock attempts to avoid his inevitable destiny as the victim. Thus, the usual formula is inverted by Conan Doyle to showcase the absence of Sherlock Holmes's power which ultimately kills him (145-51).

The spider simile illustrates the power relations that Moriarty is in control of as he is at the center of the spiderweb. Sherlock is the first person to use the spider simile when he discusses Moriarty's physical absence in his power relations. The detective observes that Moriarty is "[sitting] motionless, like a spider in the centre of its web, but that web has a thousand radiations, and he knows well every quiver of each of them" (Conan Doyle 287). The comparison between Moriarty and a spider is how Sherlock describes Moriarty's effectiveness at manipulating others to commit crimes for him. Elena Harris's article "Spider Spirit animal" states that spiders symbolize a source of inspiration because it encourages the observer, in this case Sherlock, to "explore the many facets of the problem [he is] facing in order to find the appropriate solution. The power of this animal encourages [Sherlock] to count on [his] ability to view things from multiple angles and weave mental and intuitive flexibility into [his] daily thinking" (Elena Harris). With this in mind, according to Sherlock, Moriarty is the spider. This is a compliment as it means that the professor is creative in weaving a web of people he can dominate. It also refers to Moriarty as being powerful enough to catch and kill his opponents in a calculative manner.

Furthermore, it has Sherlock reevaluate the control Moriarty has over him in the execution of this power. That Moriarty has a captivating effect on Sherlock is evident when the detective tells Watson "You know my powers, my dear Watson, and yet at the end of

three months I was forced to confess that I had at last met an antagonist who was my intellectual equal. My horror at his crimes was lost in my admiration at his skill” (288).

Sherlock has to admit to himself that his feelings towards the professor are clouding his moral judgment. Holmes, however, justifies Moriarty’s misconduct by ignoring it. Instead, he focuses on the joy of “at last” having found an equal. Also, by accepting Moriarty as his equal Sherlock believes that they have a similar relationship to power. Therefore, it is no surprise that Sherlock’s fascination with Moriarty’s intellectual abilities has driven him to refer to himself as a spider as well. Holmes shares with Watson that “[he has] woven [his] net round [Moriarty] until now it is all ready to close” (288).

The female domination symbolized by a spider correlates to the “queerness” of Sherlock and Moriarty’s SM game. Straight performativity refers to the acts that perpetuate the heterosexual male/female norm. However, a spider symbolizes the Divine Mother, Neith, in Egyptian religion and she encompasses strong creative feminine energy (Elena Harris). The spider weaves her web and controls the game as she decides what happens to her prey. Therefore, the feminine dominates the male and deviates from heteronormativity because the privilege of power shifts from male to female. However, in the case of Moriarty and Sherlock, the role of the spider is played by both. It is not a single person that creates or submits to the other. Similarly, their SM game is “queer” as it “reorders the [power] relations among sexual behaviors” (Halperin qtd. in Caro Lancho 62). The sexual and intellectual reciprocation between them is “queer” to others because neither Moriarty nor Sherlock is in control at all times (Bristow 169). Sherlock usually controls a situation because he is the only one who is intellectually capable of deducing a crime which means others rely on his power.

However, Moriarty has the same division of power with everyone he knows. This allows the professor to easily manipulate others because they are unable to outsmart him. Whenever Holmes and Moriarty come together they create the rules of their own game. This

causes excitement for both as they can finally rely on each other to take control and can just play along. Thus, at the center of power/powerlessness is an equal display of control because Moriarty and Sherlock have the same opportunities to dominate. The SM allusions are woven into Sherlock's recollection of how the professor and he have a never-ending desire to make the other submit. The detective is keen on catching Moriarty but his usual approach with other criminals falls short:

Now, if I could have done this without the knowledge of Professor Moriarty, all would have been well. But he was too wily for that. He saw every step which I took to draw my toils round him. *Again and again he strove to break away*, but I as often headed him off. I tell you, my friend, that if a detailed account of that silent contest could be written, it would take its place as the most brilliant bit of *thrust-and-parry work* in the history of detection. *Never have I risen to such a height, and never have I been so hard pressed by an opponent.* He cut deep, and yet I just undercut him. (288-89 emphasis added)

The norm of only one person being in control during erotic activities is imbalanced. Moriarty and Sherlock's difficulties in finding others who comprehend their "queer" intellectual deducing ability is what drives the two further towards one another. Furthermore, as they create this game together they arouse each other on a deeper level of understanding. They can interchange the role of "top" or "bottom." Therefore, their interactions do not adhere to acts of "straight" performativity because the top/bottom role would be designated for the male/female binary opposition and neither shows female performativity. Conversely, Moriarty, and Sherlock showcase "queer" performativity of modern male subjects as they are going against the dominant heterosexual norm and challenge the accepted sexual behavior (Fathallah 494-95).

Sherlock is on a mental high of the game he plays with Moriarty despite telling Watson that he cannot wait to “free society of [Moriarty]” (286). It sounds more like Sherlock is fully captivated by Moriarty’s allure and does not wish for the professor to end their interactions. Meanwhile, Moriarty asserts his dominance in the confines of Alienist’s office:

“I control such men [as the Ripper]. I direct them. There is not a deviant act that occurs within this city that I do not have a hand in.”

“Does that include...?”

“The Ripper is something else entirely, I admit. Even God may occasionally miss the beat of a sparrow’s wings. By acknowledging my fallibility, I am able to better prepare for the future.”

The comparison to God goes unremarked. [Alienist’s] wife and [Alienist] have already written on [Moriarty’s] extreme egotism; a need to feel as though he is at the centre of all things. [Moriarty’s] self-perception is that of a spider at the centre of a web, reaching out and controlling all things in his domain with a simple flick of his limbs. (McLean 152)

This excerpt further showcases that Moriarty views everyone as beneath him and controllable. Alienist compares Moriarty to a spider in a similar manner as Sherlock has. However, there is an additional level within the hierarchy that the professor associates himself with. The professor, also, refers to himself as a God which is unorthodox. Alienist’s use of the spider simile is interesting in this regard because a spider has been viewed as being related to the Divine Mother, Neith (Elena Harris). Therefore, although Moriarty’s remark is unconventional, symbolically Alienist does not disregard Moriarty’s self-assessment.

Furthermore, the spider’s overpowering female energy refers to similarly deviating from heteronormativity as Moriarty defies the heterosexual norm with Sherlock. Both are “queering” from the dominant and patriarchal discourse. Moriarty asks Alienist to help him in

repressing his desires for Sherlock so he can accept the detective as an inferior being rather than an equal (McLean 150). The reality of having an equal takes away the divine and uniqueness that Moriarty knows is unlikable but keeps him in a powerful position. The professor wishes to “weave every step of [his] destiny” (Elena Harris). Thus Moriarty wants to be in control at all times so he can anticipate all the consequences that could negatively affect him (148). This need to plan out his life is what drives Moriarty to decide to stop his therapy with Alienist in favor of chasing after Sherlock (156). Ultimately, the professor allows his desire for Sherlock to control him. Consequently, Moriarty follows Sherlock to Reichenbach Falls and decides to confront Sherlock and die in one another’s embrace.

So Moriarty and Sherlock’s sexually charged interactions show that accepting that both individuals have an equal amount of control is what deconstructs power/powerlessness. The reproductive aspect is the game they create together which “queers” from the man/woman heterosexual norm. Furthermore, if someone is a “bottom” it does not mean he is not in control (Bristow 169). Rather the rules that are set by the creators of the game, Moriarty and Sherlock together, determine how the power relations play out in the division of dominance and when the role of playing submissive shifts. Ultimately, a key aspect of Sherlock and Moriarty’s erotic relationship is that they overtly accept that each of them is capable and worthy of taking control. To onlookers this power dynamic is odd, “queer” and in chapter 3 the moral judgment of Sherlock and Moriarty’s actions and relationship is discussed.

Chapter 3: Good/Evil

This chapter discusses the good/evil dichotomy and how it relates to the previous binary oppositions: heterosexuality/homosexuality and power/powerlessness. Watson's depiction of Sherlock as a self-sacrificing moral agent is also analyzed as it is debatable whether Sherlock does not act immorally at all.

Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson describe agency as a key concept in providing an account of oneself. Humans can act differently according to the situation they are in (54). They are agents that make decisions for themselves rather than having their activities and identities fully controlled by their society. An autobiographical narrative is a person's human agency in how they wish to interpret the recollection of their acts. It is also a form of self-expression. However, humans are shaped by society's norms because acceptable behavior is praised and unacceptable behavior is disapproved of and this influences a person's actions. Thus, another type of agency that influences a person's actions is a moral agent. This is someone with the ability to recognize what is right or wrong and knows how to act in a manner that does not inflict damage upon others. Smith and Watson rephrase Sherry B. Ortner's definition of agency by describing it as:

The capacities people bring when they play the "games" of culture— with their rules and structures. For Ortner, sociocultural structures are always partial rather than total. And thus there is always the possibility of changing the rules— although not of escaping rules altogether. It is the individual's wit and intelligence that influence his or her potential for pressuring the rules of the games. (57)

Ortner suggests that people can outwit social structures by challenging "its rules." However, an opportunity to do so should be in place. A democracy, for instance, provides people with the ability to vote for the moral agents they want to be represented by. In a dictatorship,

people might align with the resistance to fight against oppression because they believe that the dominant social structure is wrong. However, this form of protesting rules would be punishable by the same laws they want to question. To provide an account of oneself is powerful because that person has the agency of telling their life experience. However, the ability to share this account can be suppressed or celebrated depending on that person's society. Such an account may include their moral agency and how they conform to or deviate from society's norms.

Sexuality and gender have primarily been associated with the norms "queer" challenges but "queer" is also applicable to other norms. Blackburn et al. for instance, demonstrate in their study on "queer" elements in LGBT-themed Young Adult fiction that "queer" characterization also relates to the normative constructions of families and homes (11-48). One social norm for families and homes is to belong to a traditional family that consists of a married mother and father who live together with their biological children (34). Blackburn et al. provide an example of the rejection of this norm by analyzing the story *Written on the Body* (1994) by Jeanette Winterson. The narrator, who does not reveal their gender or sexuality, has a love affair with Louise, a married woman. Thus, this narrator disrupts the social norm of Louise's family by rejecting the institution of marriage (34-35). Furthermore, Louise and the narrator's "queer" relationship challenges the heterosexual norm because it portrays the love that is absent in Louise's traditional marriage. Even though their affair is morally unacceptable it still possesses family qualities albeit different from the norm.

Gayle Rubin argues that the standards for sexuality in the contemporary West are divided into what is deemed normal and abnormal (Bristow 180). For example, a heterosexual married couple is viewed as highly socially acceptable. However, on the other end of Rubin's spectrum are sadomasochists who are socially deviant and their sexual encounters are unnatural and for certain societies even sinful. Bristow exemplifies that "[a]lthough opposite-

sex encounters may well involve highly unpleasant and even exploitative sex acts, the very fact that these involve a man and a woman grants them [a] much higher status [of acceptability] than, for example, various non-consensual activities involving sexual dissidents, such as lesbians or transsexuals” (181). However, it is important to note that “moral attitudes towards sexuality” are not fixed and their degree of acceptability is thus subject to change. Acts of sadomasochism, on the other hand, are still taboo and “viewed as unmodulated horrors incapable of involving affection, love, free choice, kindness, or transcendence” (Rubin qtd. in Bristow 181).

Victorians were afraid of people incapable of moral agency. They believed that a person’s moral judgment could be determined at face value. Erica McCrystal analyses good/evil in the main characters of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) as well as its modern adaptations. She argues that the monstrosity depicted by Hyde is a representation of Victorian anxieties towards the possibility of “biologically inherit[ing] criminality” (235). In that period excessive body hair could be associated with the primitive man in Charles Darwin’s evolution theory (236-37). This is because degeneration theorists questioned whether a beast-like resemblance was evidence of the regression of the human race. A regressed human being was viewed as being incapable of distinguishing right from wrong (236).

Benjamin Poore reads Moriarty similarly to how McCrystal analyses Hyde. McCrystal views Moriarty as a character who portrays the public’s anxieties in the Victorian period. However, in “The Final Problem,” Poore argues that Moriarty resembles the Victorians' fear for modernity (137-39). Poore’s article adopts a poststructuralist reading of Watson’s account of the presumed deaths of Holmes and Moriarty at Reichenbach Falls. The deaths are not confirmed using physical evidence (135-36). It is Watson who deduces that the wet footsteps heading in the direction of the waterfall must mean that the two men fought and did not return

alive. The professor's death is viewed as a positive outcome for London's society. The unexplainable crimes at the time turn into conspiracies. The public relies on these conspiracies to confirm that Moriarty is the criminal mastermind behind the crimes (136-37). An example of an unexplainable crime from the Victorian period is Jack the Ripper's murder spree. However, Watson is not questioned on his trustworthiness in providing an account of Sherlock and Moriarty's relationship.

John Watson provides an account of Sherlock's life before his death at Reichenbach Falls because it allows him to portray Sherlock as a moral agent. However, Professor Moriarty is characterized as "queering" from society. John starts "The Final Problem" by saying that he does not wish to speak about the events that led up to his friend's death. John claims that he is only willing to open up about what took place between Holmes and Moriarty because he has to oppose the account provided by Moriarty's brother:

My hand has been forced, however, by the recent letters in which Colonel James Moriarty defends the memory of his brother, and I have no choice but to lay the facts before the public exactly as they occurred. I alone know the absolute truth of the matter, and I am satisfied that the time has come when no good purpose is to be served by its suppression ... I shall now show [that the letters of Colonel Moriarty are] an absolute perversion of the facts. It lies with me to tell for the first time what really took place between Professor Moriarty and Sherlock Holmes. (Conan Doyle 283-84)

Watson believes that nobody but him knows what truly happened leading up to and at Reichenbach Falls. Interestingly, however, is that Watson decides that silence no longer serves a "good purpose" now that Colonel Moriarty has come forward with statements to defend his brother. One motive is that the "good purpose" of telling the story himself is that it allows John to defend "the best and the wisest man whom [he has] ever known" by regulating

which so-called facts are publicized (307). John tries to reassure the public that Sherlock is a moral agent who was willing to sacrifice his life so society would be freed from the criminal mastermind who wronged them (286). This narrative reinforces that Sherlock aligns himself with “good” acceptable behavior.

Moriarty, on the other hand, is described by Sherlock in great detail as a professor of the highest order before blemishing his social status. The detective tells Watson that “[Moriarty] had hereditary tendencies of the most diabolical kind. A criminal strain ran in his blood, which, instead of being modified, was increased and rendered infinitely more dangerous by his extraordinary mental powers” (286-87). The description fits into the Victorian period’s anxieties which included criminality as being biologically inheritable (McCrystal 235). Moriarty is an intellectual who received praise from theorists across Europe for his binomial theories in mathematics (Conan Doyle 286; McLean 147). Therefore, the prospect that an intellectually gifted man is capable of horrific crimes reinforces society’s fear that anyone might be unable to resist their darkest immoral desires.

However, it is interesting that Holmes associates himself with this abnormal side of society. Although the detective phrases it as knowledge instead of direct participation when he tells his friend “As you are aware, Watson, there is no one who knows the higher criminal world of London so well as I do” (Conan Doyle 287). Sherlock is “queering” in that he does not portray the same fear as their Victorian society. Instead, he shows total admiration for Moriarty when he tells his companion that “[Moriarty] is the Napoleon of crime, Watson. [He] is the organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city” (287). Holmes still wants to interact with his intellectual equal despite labeling Moriarty as evil. The desire to capture the professor is palpable as Sherlock muses that it will be “the greatest criminal trial of the century, the clearing up of over forty mysteries, and the rope for all of them” (288). This statement further establishes that the professor is responsible for

many unsolvable crimes and that the death penalty is viewed as an acceptable manner of executing moral justice. However, if Sherlock is successful in having Moriarty trialed by jury then the detective is in turn at least partially responsible for capital punishment. The social structure that privileges good over evil relies on moral agency in their verdict. However, the detective protects society's norms of morality. Therefore, Sherlock will most likely receive praise for doing the right thing even if that means another man's death.

Conversely, the professor provides an alternative perspective when he meets Sherlock in person and tells him "I find myself placed in such a position through your continual persecution that I am in positive danger of losing my liberty" (290). Sherlock's "good" societal behavior threatens Moriarty's freedom to live. Although Moriarty has had people murdered for small things such as asking a wrong question it is arguably not an excuse to kill him (McLean 152). Moriarty only trusts Alienist with his thoughts on committing crimes. The professor shares his frustration of having found someone who is a mirror image intellectually but has chosen to "'ally himself with tradition and order' [Alienist asks] 'And you?' 'Oh, do not be so blasé as to believe I chose evil'" (153). Moriarty explains that he chose chaos instead of the deprivileged side of good/evil. The professor uses Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory to explain his motives:

"Darwin talks of a world that is in constant flux. Animals change and adapt to circumstance. Those that fail to do so, die. Evolution arises through change. I believe we may only discover our potential by introducing the unpredictable."

"In other words, you are an agent of natural order?"

[Moriarty] nods ... "There is a new world order coming, and I intend to be at its centre. Its architect. But, everywhere I turn, I am thwarted. Holmes. Always Holmes. The Great Detective, The hero of the ailing British Empire." (153)

Darwin's article on his theory has just been published in this storyline and Moriarty fully embraces it. Moriarty's belief that he needs to actively participate in changing the rules of social structures that are in place is similar to Ortner's conceptualization of agency (57). The professor outwits his opponents so he can create chaos within London's society. Ultimately, his goal is to improve humanity through evolution to gain a more powerful position. But his perspective questions whether Moriarty's moral agency should be easily categorized as good or evil. The professor is "queering" in the sense that he is, on one hand, purposefully committing crimes and defying the moral norms that are reinforced by the justice system. On the other hand, Moriarty justifies his actions by referring to them as unpredictable and therefore beneficial to initiating changes in society. From this point of view, it is Sherlock who is an obstacle to overcome in their relationship.

Perspective becomes crucial when challenging and reversing the dichotomy of good/evil. Ultimately, a mutual understanding as the center of this opposition would be a positive outcome of deconstructing good/evil. However, this is not always realistic due to the nature of certain crimes. The severity of a person's actions, in this instance Moriarty's, has an impact on how society views that person. How society decides to act upon that judgment is subjective and controversial. Furthermore, it should be noted that the degree of moral acceptability is susceptible to change (Rubin 181). To illustrate, Moriarty and Sherlock's relationship is "queering" because it defies heteronormativity. They portray male-male desire and accept each other as intellectual equals in their power dynamic. Within their sadomasochism relationship, they create rules so when they play they can give and take control instead of a set dominant/submissive "game." Furthermore, these aspects of their relationship are categorized by certain societies, such as strongly religious ones, as sinful or unnatural and therefore immoral. However, Sherlock and Moriarty's SM relationship is

consensual and private. So are they still deserving of punishment or treatment to change their unnatural SM behavior?

It has only been since 2013 that sadomasochism has no longer been classified as a mental illness in the DSM-5. SM has, therefore, had a similar history to homosexuality because both expressions of sexual identity have been depicted in research as abnormal from a psychological perspective. The inclusion of homosexuality and SM in the DSM means that psychiatrists also suggested that people like Sherlock and Moriarty should receive treatment to cure them of these illnesses. Moriarty specifically requests Alienist to help him in the same manner as the psychiatrist “may offer [assistance to a] man overcome by desires he knows to be wrong” because Moriarty believes he needs the same help to cure the “sickness” he has developed in his obsession over Sherlock (McLean 149). Thus, even a criminal such as Moriarty can be persuaded to view his thought process as morally unacceptable and in need of a change. Ultimately, Moriarty rejects the need to conform to the social norms of moral judgment. The professor “queers” by committing to his SM relationship with Holmes. In certain communities within a society, SM is not frowned upon but seen as a consensual expression of sexuality (Bristow 169). Thus, what is odd to others, deviates from the societal norms, and differs in acceptability are all forms of “queering” that Moriarty and Sherlock exemplify in various ways through their relationship as gestured towards in “The Final Problem” and “Obsession.”

Conclusion

This case study has examined three different binary oppositions to showcase that “The Final Problem” and “Obsession” question the traditional divisions assumed by heterosexuality/homosexuality, power/powerlessness, and good/evil. Professor Moriarty and Sherlock Holmes’s relationship is “queering” as it questions and defies the aforementioned distinctions. The deconstructive efforts suggest that equality, in terms of the professor accepting the detective as his equal, is challenging the heteronormative way of thinking that reinforces the heterosexuality/homosexuality dichotomy. Similarly, an equal amount of control in power dynamics is an alternative for the rigid power/powerlessness. Sherlock and Moriarty have illustrated this with their mental SM games which they play regardless of society’s disapproval. Moriarty and Sherlock both show a lack of having moral judgment or, to put it differently, their acts of good/evil influence their decision to “queer” together.

By using “queer” this examination has suggested equality as a result of deconstructing binary oppositions but this also creates the equality/inequality dichotomy. Thus, the conclusions from deconstructing binary oppositions give rise to new oppositions that should be challenged. For instance, Moriarty and Sherlock’s relationship thrives because both are believed to be intellectually superior in comparison to others so the knowledge/ignorance dichotomy is worth exploring. The multiplicity of dichotomies and their deconstruction is beyond the scope of this research. It demonstrates why the focus of this case study was limited to three specific concepts of contestation. “Queering” has been introduced to question heterosexual norms as well as norms related to morality that are less obviously connected to sexuality. The decision for good/evil as the dichotomy to test this progressive use of “queer” is because it, in turn, relates to right/wrong, love/hate, and hero/villain. Therefore, it allows “queering” to disrupt the power that is held by the norms that work to keep this continuous loop of binary oppositions in place.

Future research could examine how “queering” is able to test other norms within the Sherlock Holmes narrative universe in literature and film adaptation. For instance, Irene Adler is a female character that possibly “queers” the masculinity/femininity dichotomy as she cross-dresses in the canon to successfully protect herself and outwit Sherlock.

Trusting/suspicious would also be interesting to “queer” because Sherlock decides who he helps based on how suspicious they are. In Irene’s case, Sherlock decides to first trust the King of Bohemia and he only realizes at the end of the story that she was more trustworthy.

Both of these dichotomies are present in various Sherlock Holmes stories and can be “queered” so the social norms that reinforce them are challenged.

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