

**Of Mice and Men:
Eve Titus's *Basil of Baker Street*
and Disney's *The Great Mouse Detective*
as Holmesian Adaptations**

Marc Napolitano

(Wagner College, Staten Island, New York, USA)

Abstract:

Walt Disney Studios' *The Great Mouse Detective* (1986) was the first (and only) Disney movie to engage Arthur Conan Doyle's ubiquitous Sherlock Holmes series as a source for an animated feature film. However, this film was actually an adaptation of a previous Holmesian adaptation: Eve Titus's children's book series, *Basil of Baker Street* (1958-1982). Titus's stated purpose in writing these books was to create a gateway through which young readers might enter the Holmes canon, though this attitude sometimes inhibits her adaptation's general concept by making her series entirely subservient to its 'legendary' source. Conversely, the Walt Disney Company's trademark infidelity toward literary sources enhances *The Great Mouse Detective* as a neo-Victorian adaptation; by deviating heavily from Titus's books, the scriptwriters and animators created an intertext that engaged a wider variety of Holmesian texts and sources. Moreover, Disney's prior expertise in anthropomorphising animals allowed the animators to endow Titus's animal characters with more individualised, human characteristics. Whereas Titus and her illustrator's traditional 'fable-like' approach to anthropomorphism encourages the young reader to identify with the titular anthropomorphic mouse and to participate in his hero-worship of Sherlock Holmes, Disney leans toward a zoomorphic vision that renders Holmes and the Victorians accessible to young viewers.

Keywords: adaptation, animation, anthropomorphism, *Basil of Baker Street*, detective fiction, Disney, *The Great Mouse Detective*, intertextuality, Sherlock Holmes.

In the trailer for the film *Saving Mr. Banks* (2013), Walt Disney (Tom Hanks) reacts with astonishment upon learning from P. L. Travers (Emma Thompson) that "Mary Poppins was a real person" (Hancock 2013: 2:16-2:18). The notion of Mary Poppins as a "real person" carries an almost paradoxical significance in this context; Disney and Travers were obviously

Neo-Victorian Studies

8:2 (2016)

pp. 136-170



‘real people’ and yet, by translating them to the screen via a fictionalised biographical narrative, the line between the ‘real’ and the ‘fake’ becomes indistinct. Tamara S. Wagner alludes to the recent popularity of these “transpositions: biographical back projections that play with a blurring of fact and fiction, art and life, and a resultant fictionalization of seeming historical reconstruction” (Wagner 2011: 213). Whatever their historical inaccuracies, such “transpositions” mark a vivid variation on the concept of film adaptation, which is again paradoxical in the context of *Saving Mr. Banks*, as the plot traces the complicated, collaborative process of adapting Travers’s *Mary Poppins* stories to the silver screen. Ironically, the character of Travers repeatedly objects to the notion of ‘Disneyfying’ her creations, despite the fact that *Saving Mr. Banks* is a Disney movie.¹ As suggested throughout this film, the presence of the Disney brand name has a unique way of complicating the already complex politics of adaptation.

Travers’s fear of what Disney will do to *Mary Poppins* – the character, not the story – further emphasises the ‘realness’ of that character to her creator. This blurring of the line between ‘real people’ and literary/historical characters reminds me of Sherlock Holmes, as Thomas Leitch humorously recounts Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s “bemusement that so many correspondents had treated Sherlock Holmes as if he were a real person” and such a “large number of readers pretend to believe that Holmes is as real as Joseph Bell even though they know perfectly well that he is not” (Leitch 2007: 211). Doyle’s flat rejection of Holmes as a ‘real person’, along with his supposed insouciance regarding how people chose to adapt the character – he was more than happy to let William Gillette marry off or murder the great detective (Doyle 1991: 79) – seems antithetical to Travers’s protectiveness of *Mary Poppins*. Nevertheless, passionate Sherlockians might be tempted to rejoice at the fact that the Walt Disney Company has largely ignored Doyle’s canon as a potential source for animated feature films.²

Scholars and cultural critics continue to characterise the Disney Corporation as an empire that conquers, colonises, and capitalises upon its textual sources to the point where the original is all but forgotten. Still, given critics’ tendency to decry how significantly Disney adaptations deviate from their sources, this assessment borders upon outmoded fidelity criticism; it also invokes the same hierarchisation of texts (which invariably places ‘sources’ above their adaptations) that Linda Hutcheon has deftly

undermined through her scholarship and through her coining of more nuanced terms for defining the relationships between adaptations and their forebears, e.g., her substitution of “adapted text” for “source” or “original” as a means of challenging the hegemony of the prior work (Hutcheon 2006: xiii). In the case of Holmes, the ‘hierarchy’ has already been compromised, for various adaptations have proved to be even more paradigmatic than the original stories. Wagner, for instance, acknowledges the Rathbone films as “displacing Conan Doyle’s actual representation of the [original] pairing” to become “a conduit or lens that altered the perception of both characters in the popular imagination” (Wagner 2011: 206). The continued influence of the Rathbone films on the popular impression of Sherlock Holmes, and thus, on subsequent adaptations of Sherlock Holmes, is striking.

Wagner uses the metaphor of a “lens”, but her description also hints toward what Leitch has described as the “daisy chain” approach to adaptation (Leitch 2011: 28), for the Rathbone films’ pronounced impact on subsequent adaptations has created a highly intertextualised Holmesian afterlife defined by the interconnections between various texts and their respective adaptations. Though this critical approach threatens the very foundation of adaptation studies by “defin[ing] every text as an intertext” (Leitch 2011: 38, added emphasis), Hutcheon celebrates both the theory and the “*politics* of intertextuality”, noting how creative visions and audience reactions to new adaptations are heavily shaped by the work’s connections to other texts (Hutcheon 2006: xii, original emphasis).³ Such intertextual approaches have been a definitive characteristic of the Disney concept of adaptation, due in part to the studio’s strong pulse on popular culture and its encyclopedic knowledge of its own history. As will be discussed throughout this paper, Disney animators continually return to tropes, techniques, character designs, and ideas from earlier films. The intertextual/“daisy chain” concept of adaptation thus provides an especially relevant standpoint from which to analyse the Disney Company’s method of adapting Sherlock Holmes; when Walt Disney Studios undertook the challenge of translating Holmes to the Disney idiom, its approach was defined by multiple intertextualities.

In 1986, Disney released *The Great Mouse Detective*. This film was not based on any of Doyle’s stories; rather, the production team crafted a film adaptation of Eve Titus’s *Basil of Baker Street* series (1958-1982), a set of children’s books chronicling the adventures of a mystery-solving

anthropomorphic mouse who resides under the floorboards of Sherlock Holmes's flat. Given her use of anthropomorphised mice, and Mickey Mouse's unwavering significance to the Disney label, Titus's books provided Disney animators with a suitable angle from which to approach Sherlock Holmes so that he could be molded to fit the Disney brand. Although *The Great Mouse Detective* is neither the most popular nor the most significant Disney animated film, its status as an adaptation of an adaptation grants it a noteworthy intertextuality; indeed, the 'daisies' – that in Leitch's terms make up the 'chain' of which *The Great Mouse Detective* too becomes part – are numerous and diverse, as the animators borrowed from Titus's texts, Doyle's series, the Rathbone films, and the Disney canon itself. *The Great Mouse Detective* thus aptly fits Mark Llewellyn and Ann Heilmann's description of neo-Victorian adaptation as a process facilitating "the dialogue between new text and old but also the intertexts and interplays between different adaptations" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 212). This "dialogue" may include a surprising diversity of texts, but that same diversity can enhance the dynamism and uniqueness of the adaptation.

Notably, *The Great Mouse Detective* deviates heavily from its principal source, drawing more from Titus's general premises than her actual storylines. However, these same infidelities to Titus facilitated the creative team's goal of including a greater variety of Holmesian elements, in the vein of the "daisy chain" intertextual model. This creative freedom is likewise detectable in the representation of the title character. Titus's Basil venerates Sherlock Holmes and thus seeks to be the mouse equivalent of the great detective. Conversely, Disney's Basil never purposefully patterns his behavior or methodology on Holmes. This approach allows the character an autonomy that Titus's character lacks.

Ironically, by achieving independence from Titus (and thereby, from Holmes), Disney's Basil is ultimately more Holmesian; rather than *trying to be* the mouse equivalent of Doyle's character, Disney's Basil *is* the mouse equivalent of Sherlock Holmes. Disney's prior success in anthropomorphising animals proves vital in this regard, for unlike Titus's Basil – drawn as a mouse who dresses up like Holmes – Disney's Basil is designed in such a way as to physically suggest what Holmes would look like if he were a rodent. This more precise design scheme, as applied to all of the mouse characters in the film, takes anthropomorphism to another level; in many ways, *The Great Mouse Detective* is not a film that

anthropomorphises mice, but rather a film that zoomorphises Holmes, Watson, and the Victorians in general. As such, Disney eclipses Titus in creating a neo-Victorian adaptation: Titus can offer access to Holmes himself through an animal character that idolises him, but Disney can offer access to the Victorians at large by reinterpreting their world for a juvenile audience through animation.

Eve Titus is remembered primarily for two popular series of children's books featuring anthropomorphic mice as the title heroes. In 1956, she published *Anatole*, a simple but charming story about a French mouse who becomes a professional cheese taster. *Basil of Baker Street* (1958) followed two years later, as Titus, a lifelong Doyle fan, crafted a story about a mouse who learns the science of deduction by observing the great Sherlock Holmes. Yet the issue of classifying Titus's book series as a particular type of adaptation is somewhat ambiguous. Julie Sanders notes that "[a]daptation both appears to require and to perpetuate the existence of a canon. [...] In this respect, adaptation becomes a veritable marker of canonical status; citation infers authority" (Sanders 2006: 8-9). While Titus clearly believes in the "canonical status" of the Holmes series and defers to the "authority" of Doyle, her series seems less focused on the canon of Holmes stories than on the legendary status of Holmes, the character. The unifying thread that binds all the books in the Basil series together – and that consistently returns the texts to any sense of 'source' – is Basil's veneration of Sherlock Holmes. Each book contains various references to Holmes, and Basil consistently claims to be following in the detective's footsteps (even when he steps into the role of archaeologist or cowboy).

Perhaps the paratextual elements surrounding *Basil of Baker Street* provide the more tangible clues regarding how to read the text in relation to the Doyle stories. In describing the functions of paratexts, Gérard Genette notes that elements such as the title, the dedication page, the chapter titles, and the illustrations provide important indications of how a text is to be processed by the reader, and can likewise help the reader decode meanings (Genette 1997: 2). The title *Basil of Baker Street* provides two clues regarding the text's connection to the Holmes mythos: the reference to Holmes's base of operation, and the naming of the title character after the actor who immortalised Holmes on film. However, the dedication page and a subsequent response to this dedication more forcefully affirm the connections. Genette asserts that a dedicatory page "is always intended for

at least two addressees: the dedicatee, of course, but also the reader, for dedicating a work is a public act that the reader is, as it were, called on to witness” (Genette 1997: 134).⁴ In the case of *Basil of Baker Street*, this purpose is expanded somewhat, as Titus seemingly calls upon the dedicatee to bear witness to the validity of her project. Titus’s dedication reads as follows: “To Adrian M. Conan Doyle in the humble hope that this book for boys and girls will be a bridge to Mr. Sherlock Holmes himself” (Titus 1958: n.p.). The inscription seems a bid for legitimacy, as Titus invokes Arthur Conan Doyle’s son, who had only recently partnered with John Dickson Carr to publish *The Exploits of Sherlock Holmes* (1954); in a sense, Titus was following in Adrian’s footsteps with her own pastiche.

Titus’s efforts in this regard proved fruitful, as the book jacket to *Basil of Baker Street* includes a quotation from Adrian Conan Doyle: “I think your idea charming [...] [one] that children should thoroughly enjoy” (Titus 1958: n.p.) The back cover of the first edition of *Basil and the Pygmy Cats* (1971), which was also dedicated to Adrian Conan Doyle, featured an even more powerful testimonial in the form of a scanned print of a letter that Adrian had composed shortly after receiving an advance copy of *Basil of Baker Street*:

My dear Mrs. Titus: —

I have just returned from Vienna to find your book awaiting me. May I offer you my heartfelt congratulations. It is a simply delightful creation, and I can assure you that my father would have revelled in every page of it. I would like to offer, at the same time, my warm congratulations to the artist.

I may say that I am honoured to have my name on the dedication page of a book which deserves complete success, not only with children, but with everybody who has a touch of youth still left in their hearts. (Doyle rpt. in Titus 1971: n.p.)

Many editions of the various books in the *Basil of Baker Street* series included either a copy of Adrian Conan Doyle’s letter, or, at the very least, quotations from the letter.⁵ The inclusion of the blurb and letter as paratexts

builds upon the ‘public’ nature of the dedications and overtly establishes *Basil of Baker Street*’s connection to Sherlock Holmes, providing something of a ringing endorsement of the children’s book series in relation to Doyle’s texts: Titus had received the Doyle seal of approval. In so doing, she had ostensibly elevated her children’s books even as she humbly made them subservient to Doyle.

It is the latter part of the original dedication that provides the more tangible clues regarding how *Basil of Baker Street* is meant to be read in relation to its ‘source’, as Titus suggests that her book can provide a gateway for young readers into the world of Sherlock Holmes. The same argument has been put forth by several critics and theorists regarding the importance of film and television adaptations for young readers. Hutcheon observes that “[a]daptations of books [...] are often considered educationally important for children, for an entertaining film or stage version might give them a taste for reading a book on which it is based” (Hutcheon 2006: 118). Leitch takes the matter further in his assessment of “entry-level adaptations”, noting that the components of a classic that most lend themselves to adaptation are the “universal elements”, though “these elements cannot be truly universal, or their target audience would already know them. They must be just out of reach” (Leitch 2007: 70). Holmes’s adventures are likely “just out of reach” to juvenile readers on a literary level, and the adventures of the cute little mouse who idolises the great detective can certainly prime young readers in the hope of their eventually taking up the works of Arthur Conan Doyle.

Still, Holmes’s universality was already well established by the late 1950s, and it is even more pervasive today. The goal of providing access to the Doyle canon is therefore potentially problematic given the aforementioned pervasiveness of Holmes. Basil’s veneration of the great detective certainly helps to reinforce why Sherlock Holmes is “worth serious attention” (Leitch 2007: 69), but a young reader might find himself or herself drawn to Holmes in the abstract sense, as opposed to being specifically drawn toward the stories and novels that make up the original series.

Though the dedication and reply letter seem an overt attempt to craft a literary legacy for her adaptation through its connection to Doyle’s canonical stories, Titus likewise benefits from the more general popularity and omnipresence of the nonliterary, ‘universal’ Holmes. Tellingly, Titus

adheres to the premise proposed by Leitch, as she emphasises the earlier cited “universal elements” that we associate with Holmes: the formula of the investigation, beginning with the arrival of the harried client; the iconic physical and sartorial props such as the violin, magnifying glass, deerstalker cap, and Inverness cape; the narration by the detective-hero’s best friend and partner; and, perhaps most importantly, the legendary status of Holmes himself. However, this delving into “universal elements” compromises the neo-Victorian potential of the books, as none of the abovementioned elements are tied to the specific nineteenth-century context/setting of the Doyle stories. The young reader will come to an appreciation of the elements of Holmes’s character which can be readily transposed to alternative geographical and temporal contexts (akin to the twenty-first-century Holmes’s move to New York City in the *Elementary* series [2012–] created by Robert Doherty). However, the young reader will ultimately develop little familiarity with the period or culture that produced Holmes.

This notion is evocative of Louisa Hadley’s observation that even those adaptations of Victorian works that try to fully recreate the age oftentimes place greater emphasis on the supposedly universal sentiments/elements of the works (Hadley 2010: 11); in the case of the *Basil of Baker Street* books, such sentiments include the general thrill of adventure/detective fiction, the joy of venerating a great detective (or two great detectives given the reader’s fondness for Basil and Basil’s own fondness for Holmes), and the conservative sense of satisfaction and security that comes with the resolution of a case and the restoration of order. Titus’s latter Basil books – *Basil and the Pygmy Cats* (1971), *Basil in Mexico* (1976) and *Basil in the Wild West* (1982) – all but reject the Victorian setting and context of Doyle’s stories while still preserving the general joys of the stories and the overall celebration of Holmes. Granted, the vision of Holmes is reductive due to the oversimplification of the historical and cultural context. Still, that same reductiveness seems essential to Titus’s celebration of Holmes’s omnipresence (and omnipotence).

Returning to the issue of Holmes’s legendary status in the Basil books, it is useful to note that when Dr. Dawson begins his narration in *Basil of Baker Street*, he immediately introduces the character of Holmes, defining Basil’s identity in relation to the great detective:

Basil was as famous a detective in our world as was Mr. Sherlock Holmes in the world of people. This came about because he studied at the feet of Mr. Holmes himself, visiting him regularly in his rooms at Baker Street, Number 221, B. (Titus 1958: 10).

Though Holmes has no spoken dialogue in the Titus text, he is continuously and reverentially referenced by both Basil and Dawson:

Basil whipped out his notebook and jotted down every word, scribbling rapidly in shorthand, or perhaps I should say shortpaw.

‘What sheer genius!’ he whispered. ‘What a brain! That man will become a legend—his fame has spread to the far corners of the earth.’ (Titus 1958: 14)

These allusions are ironic in that Holmes has already “become a legend” (otherwise, the adaptation would not even exist), but they simultaneously reinforce Titus’s deference, as she willingly places her own protagonist in a subservient position to the great detective. This technique ostensibly facilitates Titus’s goal of drawing young people toward the master detective. However, the notion of creating a gateway to Holmes, while vital to the purpose of the text, is actually frowned upon in the text itself. Basil adamantly refuses to afford the other mice access to Holmes out of fear that they will inconvenience the detective. Dawson informs the reader that

my friend had made one very strict rule when we moved to Baker Street. The rule was laid down because he did not wish to risk disturbing his hero in any way whatsoever. It stated that only Basil and myself were allowed upstairs—no other mouse was even to venture near our passageway. (Titus 1958: 16-17)

Such exclusivity adds to the mystique surrounding Holmes and contributes to the author’s endorsement of Holmes to her juvenile audience – but also to her paradoxical distancing of those same readers from Doyle’s actual protagonist.

Of course, the publishing of Adrian's letter proves that Titus was eager for an endorsement of her own, and just as her work was sanctioned by Doyle's son, Basil is sanctioned by Holmes. In *Basil and the Pygmy Cats*, Dawson writes: "Did Mr. Holmes ever see his small admirer, hidden in a corner? I believe he did, and that it pleased him to pass his methods on to a mouse" (Titus 1971: 11). He virtually duplicates this statement in *Basil in Mexico*:

My friend learns his detective lore by listening at his hero's feet when scientific sleuthing is discussed. He takes many notes in shortpaw, hidden behind a chair leg. You may ask—does Sherlock spy him? I think he does, and is charmed by his wee imitator in the deerstalker cap. (Titus 1976: 9-10)

The notion of Holmes passing on his techniques to Basil, and the twee description of Basil as a "wee imitator" (one shudders to think how Sherlock would have reacted to Watson's putting forth any such description) reaffirms Basil's dependence on Holmes.

Indeed, Basil's entire *raison d'être* seems connected to Holmes, as he later informs another character that "my only aim is to follow in the footsteps of Sherlock Holmes" (Titus 1976: 88), and perhaps this is fitting given that the adaptation is allegedly dependent on its source for its basic existence. The central problem with this approach is that while it underscores the significance of Holmes, it inhibits Basil from truly becoming as dynamic an incarnation of Holmes as he could have been, had Titus granted him greater autonomy. Titus's refusal to put Basil and Sherlock on equal terms or to establish a symbiotic relationship between the two detectives is understandable in the context of her treatment of her primary source as legendary.⁶ Nevertheless, just as a fixation on fidelity can inhibit a screenwriter's creativity when adapting literature for film, Titus's respect for Doyle (and Basil's respect for Holmes) places several constrictions on her books and on her protagonist.

In the context of this issue, it is helpful to focus once again on Titus's use of a mouse with distinctly human traits. Anthropomorphised animals, of course, are very common in children's books, and as Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman note, the fixation on this trope may be indicative of humanity's propensity for reshaping nature in its own image:

There is a moral as well an intellectual element to critiques of anthropomorphism. On this view, to imagine that animals think like humans or to cast animals in human roles is a form of self-centered narcissism: one looks outward to the world and sees only one's own reflection mirrored therein. Considered from a moral standpoint, anthropomorphism sometimes seems dangerously allied to anthropocentrism: humans project their own thoughts and feelings onto other animal species because they egotistically believe themselves to be the center of the universe. (Daston and Mitman 2005: 3-4)

Considering that Holmes remains the centre of Basil's universe (and the larger universe of Titus's book series), Daston and Mitman's comments seem strikingly relevant. Yet the potential neo-Victorian metaphors here are likewise striking: just as writers of fables cast animals in human roles, neo-Victorian authors appropriate the Victorians and their iconic characters and reinvent them in a contemporary image.

Nevertheless, the way in which Basil is anthropomorphised by Titus and, perhaps more significantly, by illustrator Paul Galdone is somewhat complicated. When comparing Basil to Holmes, Dawson claims that "Mr. Holmes was tall and thin, with sharp, piercing eyes. And if ever a mouse may be said to resemble a man, then Basil was that mouse!" (Titus 1958: 11). However, the text's illustrations do not corroborate these descriptions. Galdone places heavier emphasis on Basil's basic 'mousiness' as opposed to his human characteristics; although he walks on his hind legs and wears clothing, his physical features are those of a rodent as opposed to a tiny human or a cartoon mouse like Mickey. The only thing about Basil that is actually suggestive of Holmes is his wardrobe, and here, the illustration matches the description, as Dawson notes that "[Basil] even dressed like his hero, thanks to a clever little tailor who copied Sherlock's wardrobe almost exactly" (Titus 1958: 11). All of Titus's mouse characters, as drawn by Galdone, retain a general rodent-like physicality, and the one element that truly distinguishes one mouse from another is his or her garments.

This seemingly innocuous detail is perhaps the ultimate indicator of Basil's second-class citizenship in relation to Holmes. As drawn by Galdone, Basil is not the distinctive mouse equivalent of Sherlock Holmes.

Rather, he is a generic mouse who *dresses* like Sherlock Holmes. Kate Mitchell notes that although the goal of neo-Victorianism is to “recreate the past in a meaningful way”, many neo-Victorian novels come across as simply “playing nineteenth-century dress-ups” (Mitchell 2010: 3), and the fact that Titus and Galdone are literally playing dress-up with their mice characters further limits the neo-Victorian potential of the Basil series. The anthropomorphic element allows the child reader to connect with Basil, but Titus’s approach to characterising Basil provides little in the way of “(re)interpretation, (re)discovery and (re)vision concerning the Victorians” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4, original emphasis). Ultimately, Basil’s dressing up as Holmes and worshipping at the altar of his idol promotes a veneration of the Holmesian as opposed to an active engagement with the Victorian.

Conversely, Walt Disney Studios (which, as will be discussed shortly, took a very different approach to the design of the anthropomorphic characters) found more effective ways of exploring (and exploiting) this neo-Victorian potential. Whether Disney’s *The Great Mouse Detective* deserves to be regarded as superior to Titus’s source text is a matter of opinion, though by resisting Titus’s concept of Basil’s veneration of Holmes, the creative team managed to embrace the Holmesian components of her premise in a manner that more effectively conveyed the notion of Basil as Holmes’s mouse equivalent. Understandably, this reality may have been cold comfort to Titus herself, as one of the film’s co-writers, Steve Hulett, reflects: “Titus, like any author, was sort of miffed that we didn’t use more of the books – more stuff from her books. But you know, you’re taking the premise as a springboard and adapting it” (Hulett 2012: n.p.). While many filmmakers and screenwriters would agree with this approach, stressing the need for creative freedom, the fact that *The Great Mouse Detective* is a Disney film automatically complicates the issue, given the aforementioned cultural baggage that the Disney brand name usually carries.

Leitch astutely observes that in the ‘Making Of’ featurettes that document the adaptation and production processes behind its animated films, the Walt Disney Company has a unique way of seizing possession of literary properties through “shift[ing] the subject of ‘classic’ from Dickens [or any other canonical author] to Disney by invoking a background history that belongs exclusively to the Disney franchise” (Leitch 2007: 89). In other words, by trying to promote their new work as a ‘Disney classic’, the

creative team frames it in relation to pre-existing Disney films, as opposed to emphasising its literary pedigree. *The Great Mouse Detective* is no exception in this regard, as the 1986 ‘Making Of’ featurette contains only a single reference to Titus’s *Basil of Baker Street* and no references whatever to Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes oeuvre. Instead, the featurette opens with shots from ‘Steamboat Willie’ (1928), while the narrator highlights Disney’s longstanding tradition of utilising anthropomorphic mice, dating all the way back to Mickey’s debut; “I think mice are sort of in the family. We’ve just done mice all our lives, and I suppose we sort of are in love with them”, quips Roy E. Disney (Clements, Musker, Michener, and Mattinson 1986b: 0:22-0:28).

In a manner not unlike Titus’s ploy with the dedication and response letter, this emphasis on tradition comes across as a deliberate attempt by the marketing team to frame *The Great Mouse Detective* within the Disney ethos, a strategy that seems particularly appropriate given that Disney was still recovering from the failed experiment of *The Black Cauldron* (1985) – the most nontraditional Disney film of all time.⁷ As the featurette concludes, the narrator assures the audience that “Mickey can take a well-deserved rest while his descendants carry on the great tradition of Disney’s animated mice” (Clements, Musker, Michener, and Mattinson 1986b: 7:32-7:39). Though the featurette conveys the sense of self-consciousness that Heilmann and Llewellyn find essential to neo-Victorianism (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 4), it is the Disney heritage, and not the literary or Victorian heritage, that matters. Furthermore, *The Great Mouse Detective*’s premise is framed as a Disney trope in spite of its having been created by Titus. Based on this featurette, Disney is apparently offering a gateway into *The Great Mouse Detective* via the Disney canon as opposed to using *The Great Mouse Detective* as a gateway to the Titus or Doyle canons.

Such usurpations are in keeping with the general trends in Disney’s approach to adaptation. Richard Schickel famously asserted in his oft-quoted and enduring assessment of “the Disney version” that Disney

came always as a conqueror, never as a servant. It is a trait, as many have observed, that many Americans share when they venture into foreign lands hoping to do good but equipped only with knowhow instead of sympathy and respect for alien traditions. (Schickel 1968: 227).

The true implications of this critique return us to the ‘entry-level’ adaptation arguments of Leitch and Hutcheon, for the real danger of Disney, as perceived by Deborah Ross, is that Disney adaptations present themselves as the dominant texts. Disney films steer young viewers toward Disney products instead of steering potential readers toward literary sources:

Over the last 60 years, the Disney Corporation has bought more and more children’s classics, oversimplifying and packaging them for audiences much younger than those their authors had in mind. By the time our eight-year-olds have developed the vocabulary and syntactical sophistication to appreciate the humour and style of Milne or Grahame or Carroll (if in fact they ever do), they reject their works as ‘baby stuff.’ Since these stories will then be known to our children only in the Disney version, Disney has gained a monopoly on the next generation’s fantasies. (Ross 2000: 222-223)

Still, Walt Disney himself conceded that this approach was not always successful, as his own distaste for the studio’s adaptation of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice* books has been well documented. Walt noted that the failure of the animated *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) was an indication that there were “classic[s] we couldn’t tamper with; I resolved never to do another one” (qtd. in Grant 1998: 247). His decision, however, did not grow out of any sense of deference, but out of a fear that the audience would be unreceptive if the story was already visually etched in the public consciousness (Grant 1998: 247). The popularity of Carroll’s books and, perhaps more notably, of Tenniel’s illustrations, precluded the necessary application of ‘Disney magic’ so as to grant the company ‘ownership’ of the story.

Walt’s words may provide some clues as to why the Disney Company did not attempt to produce an animated adaptation of Sherlock Holmes, particularly given the criticality of the Paget illustrations, the Gillette dramatizations, and the Rathbone films to the public’s perception of the lead character. The Disney Company would not have been able to appropriate the great detective in the same way that they had taken possession of Winnie-the-Pooh, Mr. Toad, Tinker Bell, or the countless

fairy-tale characters that populated their films.⁸ Nevertheless, recalling the previously discussed featurette, the studio had a distinct advantage in the case of *The Great Mouse Detective*: Titus's fable had provided them with a unique framework for approaching Holmes, one that fit the company's ethos on several different levels.

Although the creative team's innumerable divergences from Titus's text seem to underscore the inherent problems with Disney's approach to adaptation, these same deviations ironically proved essential to strengthening the connections between *The Great Mouse Detective* and both the official and unofficial Sherlock Holmes canons by facilitating experimentation with a wider variety of Holmesian texts and motifs. As co-director Burny Mattinson asserts: "We loved the old Sherlock Holmes films, the Basil Rathbone films, so we didn't really want to do what Eve Titus had done. We wanted to do what Rathbone and what Conan Doyle had done" (Mattinson 2012: n.p.). By placing the Rathbone films on the same level as the original Doyle stories, Mattinson reaffirms the significance of these adaptations to the legacy of Holmes in film and popular culture; however, the more noteworthy implication of this quotation is the intertextual slant of the creative team's approach. As noted, the "daisy chain" model of adapting Titus's texts allowed Disney to bring in various other sources – including the Rathbone films⁹ – when executing their vision. The directors' determination not to limit themselves to the Titus series simultaneously provided them with the freedom to explore the concept of anthropomorphising a Disney-style mouse into a miniature Sherlock Holmes.

The Great Mouse Detective was the first Disney film produced in the wake of *The Black Cauldron* debacle, a setback which had left many insiders and outsiders wondering whether Disney animation would survive the 1980s. The studio chief, Ron Miller, had recently been ousted from power, and there was a fear amongst the animation staff that Michael Eisner and Jeffrey Katzenberg, who had no experience with animation, would simply shut down that division of the studio. More immediately, there were fears that the duo would cancel production on *The Great Mouse Detective* due to its having been greenlit by Miller (Mattinson 2012: n.p.). Fortunately, Roy E. Disney tirelessly championed the film to Eisner and Katzenberg. Mattinson recalls that

Roy called me up one day and said, ‘Look, I don’t know if we’re going to continue with animation here because the guys are really disappointed with *The Black Cauldron*,’ which had just finished prior. ‘But you have a chance to sell them the story.’ So Eisner and Katzenberg both came down and we pitched the story to them. And it didn’t look like they were really that interested, and when we showed them a storyboard we had worked up, and again, they were indifferent because they weren’t used to storyboards. In fact they weren’t used to animation at all. But then we took them upstairs, and there was one sequence we had put onto story reels. It was the sequence when Basil and Dawson walk into the bar and there’s dancing going on and a crowd of bums sitting around. It was up on story reels where we had dialogue, and when they looked at it they were like, ‘Wow, you know we can make some changes here, develop the story ourselves,’ and they were really excited about that, so they said okay and gave us the go ahead on the picture. (Mattinson 2012: n.p.)

The creative team’s winning over of Eisner and Katzenberg prefigured the film’s success with critics and audiences, victories which proved a welcome affirmation that the rumors of the death of Disney animation had been greatly exaggerated. The ‘Disney Renaissance’ would not begin in earnest until the release of *The Little Mermaid* in 1989, but *The Great Mouse Detective* was an important step toward this resurgence.¹⁰

While the artists and writers who undertook this project had great enthusiasm for the piece, there was a fundamental disagreement regarding the basic tone of the adaptation. John Musker and Ron Clements gravitated toward the idea of a parodic spoof of Sherlock Holmes, while Mattinson and co-writer Mel Shaw preferred to think of the piece as a more serious pastiche – a Sherlock Holmes film in the Disney style using Titus’s premise as the adaptive conduit (Mattinson 2012: n.p.). Both factions agreed, however, that every attempt should be made to preserve the English roots of the Holmes mythos despite the fact that Katzenberg was initially in favor of Americanising the film. Mattinson recalls that “Jeffrey told us to get rid of any English atmosphere in the film and change the voices so they were more

American, and we started having a fit” (Mattinson 2012: n.p.).¹¹ For the animators, maintaining a pronounced sense of English identity, one evocative of the Doyle stories and the Rathbone films, was essential to the project.

Fortunately, the artists had several tools at their disposal to facilitate this goal. *The Great Mouse Detective* emerged at a unique moment when the studio was exploring Victorian texts as sources for film. ‘Mickey’s Christmas Carol’ (1983), a short film inspired by Dickens’s ubiquitous Christmas book, proved instrumental to the development of *The Great Mouse Detective*, as the creative team utilised several of the Victorian backdrops that had been painted for the Mickey Mouse short when first pitching the Titus property as a potential source for an animated feature:

We went to Ron Miller’s office and we all sat around a table, and Joe [Hale] said that he thought [*Basil of Baker Street*] would make a really good picture. Ron looked at it and wasn’t sure, but Joe said, ‘I have a picture here.’ What happened was, we were making ‘Mickey’s Christmas Carol’ at the time. So he took one of the background scenes out of ‘Mickey’s Christmas Carol,’ but instead of having the Disney characters in there, he put in the mice characters from *Basil of Baker Street* against the backdrop. And Miller looked at it and said, ‘Wow, this could be fun.’ So we said let’s do it, let’s start working on it. (Mattinson 2012: n.p.)

It seems fitting that a short film starring the most popular anthropomorphic mouse of all time would help to facilitate the development of *The Great Mouse Detective*. Moreover, though ‘Mickey’s Christmas Carol’ epitomises Disney’s tendency toward usurpation by replacing Dickens’s characters with Disney characters, the background elements of the animated short, in their design and colouring, are conspicuously suggestive of a nostalgic, Dickensian image of Victorian London. Indeed, the design scheme is reminiscent of Heilmann and Llewellyn’s description of neo-Victorian adaptations that attempt

to project back to the viewers [...] a version of reality that aims to provide an authentic representation of what they *imagine* to be the Victorian landscape. [...] The adaptation

becomes something that we can relate to at a fundamental level and recognize as comforting, familiar, and homelike in the sense of nostalgic. (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 217, original emphasis)

The creative team on *The Great Mouse Detective* ultimately painted new backgrounds for the film (which is set much later in the Victorian era than its predecessor), but just as the design team had tried to paint a Dickensian vision of London in ‘Mickey’s Christmas Carol’, so did the animators on *The Great Mouse Detective* attempt to craft an evocative vision of Doyle’s London.

Building upon the neo-Victorian design of ‘Mickey’s Christmas Carol’, the design team on *The Great Mouse Detective* created what is arguably the most consistently atmospheric film in the Disney canon. The backdrops and background animation include rain, fog, yellow gaslights, horse-drawn carriages, smoking chimneys, and various other elements that are immediately reminiscent of the popular image of Doyle’s Victorian detective stories.¹² While the film does not necessarily present an ‘authentic’ Victorian setting (the animated medium automatically places limits on the very notion of authenticity), it fully embraces the stylised ambiance of Victorian detective fiction, and more specifically, the Holmes texts and the Rathbone films. The centrality of atmosphere to *The Great Mouse Detective* thus accentuates the adaptation’s relation to the Holmesian sources even as the film deviates from Titus’s books.¹³

Though the beautifully painted backgrounds highlight the Victorian components of *The Great Mouse Detective*, it is the character designs above all that reveal the adaptation’s neo-Victorian qualities, which can again be framed in relation to the “daisy chain” model. Given Disney’s tendency to reuse specific character models in their animated films, it is understandable that many of the ‘daisies’ in the film’s adaptive ‘chain’ originated in previous Disney films. Indeed, the anthropomorphic component of Titus’s books allowed the animators to return to techniques that had been successfully utilised in earlier movies. In a memorandum on Disney’s *Robin Hood*, animator Ken Anderson observed that when conceptualising this 1973 film, “[w]e decided to do what we do best: use animals for the characters” (Anderson 1973-4: 24).¹⁴ As noted, the framing of a Disney film as a ‘classic’ in relation to pre-existing Disney films may seem like self-

aggrandisement, yet the use of character types, designs, and movements from previous Disney films may have less to do with self-promotion or self-plagiarism than with the basic realities of the animated medium, which frequently promotes the reusing of well-established shapes, tropes, and techniques.¹⁵

Notably, *The Great Mouse Detective* prompted the animators to return to successful designs that had been developed previously, and one of the most intriguing intertextual dimensions of *The Great Mouse Detective* in relation to the Disney canon is its engagement with *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* (1949). Disney's (very loose) adaptation of Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) is noteworthy for the heavily anthropomorphised designs of the animal characters; whereas Grahame's characters retain a certain naturalism whatever their anthropomorphic qualities (Water Rat, Mole, and the various other animal characters frequently act on their animal instincts in spite of their humanoid aspects), Disney's Ratty and Moley are depicted as fundamentally human, possessing only superficial animal features.¹⁶ However, the most notable components of the visual design of this pairing are the Holmesian motifs that shape the characters: the tall, thin Ratty dresses in a manner virtually identical to the theatrical/cinematic Holmes and boasts several Holmesian props including the calabash pipe and deerstalker cap, while the shorter, rounder Moley sports a bowler hat, wingtip collar, and bowtie evocative of Nigel Bruce's Watson.¹⁷ Furthermore, the basic shapes of the two characters, with Ratty standing straight and slender in comparison to the stocky and slouchy Moley, are likewise reminiscent of the Rathbone/Bruce pairing. The fact that this film was actually narrated by Basil Rathbone himself may have inspired the animators to base the design of the feature's most prominent duo on the famous pairing of Rathbone's Holmes and Bruce's Watson.

Ratty and Moley had recently appeared in *The Great Mouse Detective*'s all-important predecessor, 'Mickey's Christmas Carol', and the Holmesian design-scheme of the duo was thus very much on the minds of the creative team. Mattinson recalls that "we wanted to kind of take a *Wind in the Willows* approach to the film" (Mattinson 2012: n.p.). The designs of Basil and Dawson in *The Great Mouse Detective* are near duplications of Ratty and Moley (and thus, of an exaggerated caricature of Holmes and Watson as they were portrayed by Rathbone and Bruce):

When we approached the design of the characters, most of it was done like what the Basil Rathbone and the Nigel Bruce films had done. Bruce was stocky while Rathbone was tall and skinny, and we kept both Basil and Dawson in that same shape. That's the thing in animation: we always look for shapes to designate the characters. So that's why, if you looked at a line up in silhouette, you'd see that Dawson was much rounder than Basil, who was tall and lanky. Then you have Ratigan, who is more straight with broad shoulders, and certainly more angular. Sort of menacing in shape. (Mattinson 2012: n.p.)

Mattinson's reference to the characters in silhouette is fitting given that when Holmes and Watson actually appear in *The Great Mouse Detective*, they stand in silhouette, and their physical features are nearly identical to those of Basil and Dawson (Clements, Musker, Michener, and Mattinson 1986a: 22:47-22:57).

The basic advantage of this design-scheme is two-fold, particularly when one compares it to the more generic animal-oriented designs of Galdone's illustrations. First, the emphasis on variety gives each of the lead characters a greater sense of individuality in comparison to his literary predecessor (which is particularly important in the case of Professor Ratigan, as will be discussed shortly). Disney's experience in designing and characterising anthropomorphised animals with highly individualised personalities allows for a true diversity of sizes, shapes, colours, and characters to emerge. This approach contradicts traditional, fable-like anthropomorphism, the type employed by Titus, who once noted that mice were the ideal protagonists for children's stories because "children are tiny people in a world of giants" (qtd. in McKuras 2001: 1). Such an approach, deliberately downplays distinctiveness:

Whereas the same stories told about humans might lose the moral in a clutter of individuating detail of the sort we are usually keen to know about other people, substituting animals as actors [in fables] strips the characterisations down to prototypes. (Daston and Mitman 2005: 9)

Conversely, Disney does not simply rely on ‘prototypes’ in the manner of Titus’s text. Disney also takes the issue of the child reader/viewer’s identification with an anthropomorphic mouse character in a more nuanced direction by introducing a child character, Olivia Flaversham.¹⁸ Olivia is clearly the stand-in for the juvenile members of the audience, and while Titus’s child reader is supposed to identify with Basil simply because he is a mouse, the juvenile moviegoer identifies with Olivia because she is a brave, playful, intelligent, and moral child who thrills at the opportunity to share an adventure with a great detective. While traditional mouse fables put forth the universal moral that little guys (i.e. children) are capable of great feats (comparable to and sometimes exceeding the feats of grown-ups), *The Great Mouse Detective* presents children as being capable of big achievements by having Olivia – a child – achieve big things throughout the movie. Her ‘mousiness’, like the ‘mousiness’ of the wider Victorian populace/society presented onscreen, is incidental.

This brings up the second major benefit of Disney’s approach to anthropomorphism: since the Disney film stresses individuated characterisation, and, in so doing, more seamlessly merges the mouse and human elements, the design scheme in *The Great Mouse Detective* suggests that these are human figures who happen to have rodent-like features (as opposed to their being mice who simply dress like humans). This approach influences the overall portrayal of the mouse society presented onscreen. In Titus’s *Basil of Baker Street*, Basil and Dawson create a little town for mice in Sherlock Holmes’s cellar:

‘We could build a town here. Picture a row of cosy flats on that empty shelf next to the front windows—plus shops, a school, a library, a town hall, and other buildings. A name for the town? Ah, I have it—Holmestead!’

‘A brilliant idea, Basil! Best of all, we could steal upstairs to listen to our beloved Sherlock as often as we pleased.’ (Titus 1958: 12)

Here again, Sherlock’s centrality to Basil’s universe becomes apparent as Basil builds an entire society around Holmes, but in the Disney film, the mice function completely independent of the human world and do so in what is essentially a scaled-down version of Victorian London. It is never

suggested that the mice deliberately modelled their society on that of the humans who are briefly glimpsed throughout the film; to do so would undermine their aforementioned independence. Fundamentally, these mice are tiny nineteenth-century Londoners interacting in a society that embodies all of the distinctive characteristics and complexities of Victorian England. Though the marketing team behind the film played up *The Great Mouse Detective* as a new Disney classic based on its use of one of the company's trademark tropes, *The Great Mouse Detective* presents the most human-like mice in the Disney canon, not only in terms of their design but likewise in terms of their autonomy.¹⁹

The contrasts between Titus's and Disney's concepts of anthropomorphism reflect larger contrasts regarding the neo-Victorian traits of the two adaptations. Titus's earlier quoted description of the suitability of mice as protagonists in children's fiction seems reminiscent of some of the basic premises of neo-Victorianism, as Heilmann and Llewellyn memorably note that, in the case of neo-Victorian texts, the "contemporary reader [...] stands peering at the display case glass that has itself become a mirror" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 163). The critics use the same mirror metaphor that Daston and Mitman utilise in defining anthropomorphism (see above), and certainly, for Titus, the child reader who initially thinks that he or she is reading a fable ultimately sees him or herself in the image of the mouse protagonist. However, the Disney film's rejection of Titus's generalised, fable-like anthropomorphism in favour of a zoomorphic approach that allows for greater individualisation ultimately proves far more analogous to dominant trends in neo-Victorianism, especially given the neo-Victorian tendency to reduce the historical 'otherness' of the Victorians in the hope of making them more comprehensible (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2010: 24). While Titus and Galdone's approach can inspire hero-worship of Holmes in the child reader through his or her identification with Basil, the Disney film's approach renders an entire Victorian populace (and the Victorian age itself) accessible to the young viewer, who can process the fashions, styles, values, traits, and tendencies of the initially alien era through Disney's detailed design scheme and zoomorphic concept.

Mattinson helped to push the piece even further toward neo-Victorianism through his conception and design of the main villain, Professor Ratigan, a character that diverges widely (and widely successfully) from Titus's text. While the 'Making Of' featurette again

frames this character solely in relation to the Disney canon – the narrator boasts that “[t]here’s nothing quite as memorable as a Disney villain” (Clements, Musker, Michener, and Mattinson 1986b: 2:19-2:22), thus laying claim to a character created by Titus and ignoring Professor Moriarty – in this case, such boasting is warranted, as Disney’s Ratigan is essential to the film’s success as both an adaptation and a neo-Victorian interpretation. Notably, Ratigan’s centrality to the effectiveness of the film is reminiscent of the contemporary emphasis on the Victorian villain in neo-Victorian texts.²⁰ Furthermore, if Basil is to truly become the mouse equivalent of Sherlock Holmes – as opposed to simply dressing up like Holmes – he must be matched against a worthy foe.

Though Ratigan’s design scheme is particularly important, his conceptual development further highlights the creative team’s intertextual approach to adaptation. Reflecting on Mattinson’s concept for translating Titus’s Ratigan to film, Hulett recalls that

[w]e were developing Ratigan, and Burny was the one who had the great idea: let’s get Vincent Price to do the villain. Burny was familiar with a picture that he liked a lot called *Champagne for Caesar* (1950). It had Ron Coleman, Vincent Price, and Art Linkletter of all people. In that film, Vincent Price plays this big, over the top, eccentric, larger than life villain. So, basically what we were doing in *Basil of Baker Street* with Vincent Price as Ratigan – because Ratigan is a much bigger villain in the film than Eve Titus’s Ratigan – is that we took, essentially, a lot of the character beats from Vincent Price’s villain in *Champagne for Caesar*, and transposed a lot of his tics and personality traits from that character into Vincent Price as Ratigan. A lot of the character development for Ratigan comes from Vincent Price playing the villain in *Champagne for Caesar*. There’s quite a bit of Ratigan in that characterization. (Hulett 2012: n.p.)

Mattinson confirms that the 1950 film inspired both the casting of Price and the subsequent development of Ratigan: “[Price] played an executive in that movie who was really over-the-top, very comical [...] but had a menace to him. And he looked menacing. He had these broad shoulders and his suit

was broad, so it was a great character” (Mattinson 2012: n.p.), in both a visual and vocal sense.

The use of an obscure 1950s comedy like *Champagne for Caesar* as an additional ‘source’ for *The Great Mouse Detective* once again highlights the significance of the “daisy chain” model to Disney’s methodology, but Mattinson’s emphasis on the visual dimensions of the character reinforces the effectiveness of Disney’s approach to anthropomorphism. Though Titus describes Ratigan as possessing several of Moriarty’s “skeleton-like” features (Titus 1964: 66), Galdone depicts him as yet another generic looking mouse who can only be distinguished from Basil by his clothing. Conversely, Mattinson and animator Glen Keane re-imagined Ratigan as a large and vicious sewer rat who despises being reminded of this ‘low’ birthright. The awkward angles that define the animated character’s physicality are used to convey the notion that he has crammed his huge, broad-shouldered frame into a tight suit with the hope of passing for “a big mouse” (Clements, Musker, Michener, and Mattinson 1986a: 17:58). He continuously (and comically) affects respectability, frequently extending his little finger and occasionally walking on point, but beneath the surface of this aristocratic façade is a brutal criminal who will violently cast off all the trappings of civilised society when confronting the great detective who has foiled him. It is a characterisation that is strikingly evocative of his forebear, Professor Moriarty, in ‘The Final Problem’ (1893), and in spite of the numerous intertexts shaping the creative team’s interpretation of Ratigan, he fundamentally functions as the arch-villain and criminal mastermind represented by Doyle’s Moriarty; early in the film, Basil notably refers to his nemesis as “the Napoleon of crime” (Clements, Musker, Michener, and Mattinson 1986a: 11:16), further highlighting the connection.²¹

This interpretation allows Basil to step confidently into Holmes’s role as the domestic defender of the British Empire.²² Ratigan’s scheme threatens to topple the monarchy (or, at the very least, the mouse equivalent of Queen Victoria), and the film’s climax includes a confrontation at Buckingham Palace during the queen’s diamond jubilee, a chase across the London skyline by way of Nelson’s Column and Tower Bridge, and a final confrontation atop Parliament’s Clock Tower. Furthering the pervasive sense of Victorian Englishness here is the fact that the impromptu hot-air balloon that Basil constructs when pursuing Ratigan’s airship uses the Union Jack as its envelope. None of these elements are included in the

heavily de-Victorianised Titus text, and while this vivid re-creation of late nineteenth-century London hints toward a traditionalist endorsement of Victorianism (much as Titus endorses the Holmesian as opposed to reinterpreting it), this dynamic characterisation of Disney's Basil as the mouse equivalent of Victorian England's greatest hero opens up new possibilities for some of the subversive elements of neo-Victorian adaptations.²³

The creative team's use of Holmesian texts as sources for the film seems fairly traditional at first glance, though in keeping with their more precise and detailed method of anthropomorphism, the Holmesian textual references are more specific than in Titus's generalised approach. The first meeting between Basil and Dawson is modelled heavily on Holmes and Watson's first encounter in *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), with the detective deducing that his new acquaintance is a surgeon who has recently returned from military service in Afghanistan (Clements, Musker, Michener, and Mattinson 1986a: 7:59-8:02). Later, when studying a piece of paper dropped by the villainous Fidget, Basil observes that the letter had been "gummed" by the suspect (Clements, Musker, Michener, and Mattinson 1986a: 38:40), utilising Holmes's unique verbiage from 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' (1891) (Doyle 2003: 284). While conducting an experiment in his flat, he fires off his pistol indoors, much to the consternation of his landlady, as Holmes does in 'The Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual' (1893). Basil even possesses Holmes's mercurial personality, abruptly alternating between extremes of energetic exuberance and pessimistic lethargy throughout the film.²⁴

All of these allusions are clever, though perhaps the most dynamic allusion to the Holmes canon is the incorporation of Holmes's hound, Toby, featured in *The Sign of Four* (1890). Whereas Titus gives Basil several animal companions and colleagues, none of these creatures are connected in any way to the Holmes canon. The Disney film's addition of Toby helps to further link the adaptation back to the original Holmes texts, but more significantly, it grants Basil a power that Holmes himself lacks, for the film establishes that Basil is the one who trained the Basset Hound in the art of tracking (Clements, Musker, Michener, and Mattinson 1986a: 23:51-23:54). Thus, Holmes's successes when investigating with the dog are actually attributable to Basil, a complete reversal of the Titus text in which all of Basil's successes are attributable to Holmes. This revision is arguably the

most noteworthy consequence of Disney's determination to operate loosely within the framework of Titus's text, and, as noted, it hints toward the subversive qualities that are associated with revisionist Victorian texts; here, the greatest detective of the Victorian age owes a distinct debt of gratitude to a bold little mouse. Basil, who is part Disney cartoon mouse, part Titus creation, and part Sherlock Holmes, thus gains a vitality and independence that his literary predecessor lacks as a result of the latter standing so squarely in the shadow of Holmes.

Both *Basil of Baker Street* and *The Great Mouse Detective* confine Sherlock Holmes to the periphery of the narrative, but Basil's unceasing references to Holmes in the Titus texts give the detective a persistent presence throughout the entire story; like any true spirit, Holmes is unseen but pervasive. *The Great Mouse Detective* is much more subtle in its depiction: Holmes's presence is felt only through a few clever shadows placed on the walls of Baker Street, and also by the recurring leitmotif of a violin. Basil never once mentions Holmes's name, nor is it established that he developed his detective skills by observing Holmes. Rather, Basil seems to possess the inherent abilities that define Holmes as a character – another subversive modification to the source, as Holmes's abilities are no longer unique to him. Disney's particular brand of anthropomorphism is crucial to this reading, as the visual design of the character allows him to *become* Holmes in miniature: “the great mouse detective”.²⁵ He effectively takes the place of the human detective, though here again, much of Disney's success in this regard is attributable to the design scheme, as the zoomorphised Victorian world hidden beneath the surface of Holmes's London gives Basil an environment in which he can act freely as the mouse equivalent of Sherlock Holmes (and through which the young viewer can gain a sense of the historical era that Holmes embodied). Although this approach ostensibly reduces the film's potential to draw young viewers toward Doyle's texts, the truth is that *The Great Mouse Detective* does not need overt allusions to Holmes himself in order to tout the merits of the Sherlock Holmes stories. With Basil standing in as the mouse equivalent to Holmes, all of the rich elements of the detective's character that have served to make him such a popular and enduring figure in literature and on screen are ever-present.

In comparing the Rathbone films produced by Universal Studios with the Granada television series starring Jeremy Brett, Leitch notes that the former treats Holmes “as a resource to be pressed into service, a timeless

hero who, once resurrected, can never die or age” (Leitch 2007: 231). Conversely, the Granada filmmakers, according to Leitch, pursue their goal of reaffirming Doyle’s (and Holmes’s) definitive canonical status “through selective fidelity, presenting more dramatically compelling versions of Holmes’s adventures set in an expanded universe bound by Victorian times and mores” (Leitch 2007: 231). This contrast seems somehow implicative of the contrast between Titus’s texts and Disney’s film; like the Universal series, Titus treats Sherlock Holmes as timeless and legendary, and utilises him as the heroic inspiration for a children’s book hero, while Disney adopts the Granada method of recreating a Victorian universe and being “selectively” faithful to a wider variety of Holmesian texts. The latter methodology allows for a more pronouncedly neo-Victorian approach to the anthropomorphic adaptation concept; moreover, though the Victorian world presented on film is in keeping with Disney’s stylised realism, it is remarkably true to the stylisations that typically define Holmes on film, particularly in the Rathbone movies. Still, it is the Granada series, as opposed to the Rathbone films, that seems the most fitting companion to *The Great Mouse Detective*, and much as this TV programme initiated a Renaissance period in Holmesian adaptations, Disney would experience its own Renaissance in feature film animations a few years later, thanks in part to the success of *The Great Mouse Detective*.

Notes

1. This paradox did not escape several film critics. Various journalists objected to the sentimentalising of the Disney-Travers relationship and to the film’s overly positive portrayal of Walt Disney, whose warmth eventually ‘saves’ Travers; Landon Palmer cleverly noted that just as the Walt Disney Company “Disney-fied” Travers’s books, “*Saving Mr. Banks* Disney-fies a person, incorporating her literary identity wholesale into the Disney brand” (Palmer 2013: n.p.).
2. This despite the fact that cinema’s most famous Holmes, Basil Rathbone, once claimed that “[t]he only possible medium still available to an acceptable present-day presentation of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s stories would be a full-length Disney cartoon” (Rathbone 1962: 180).
3. In his chapter on *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in *Victorian Literature and Film Adaptation*, Leitch proposes several different models and metaphors for

adaptation, including a “family tree” model: “[T]his model, positing a line of descent within a given textual family, values both the similarities that are to be expected between successive members and the differences that are bound to crop up over an extended period of time” (Leitch 2011: 31). Though this model does not place the ‘source text’ at the centre of the adaptive universe, it still threatens to create something of a hierarchy based on its emphasis on linearity; moreover, unlike the “daisy chain” model, it does not allow for texts outside of the “family” to enter the discourse. In spite of, or perhaps because of, its more liberated adaptive framework, the “daisy chain” model is more relevant in discussions of *The Great Mouse Detective* given the sheer variety of texts and intertexts that define the work.

4. Genette likewise distinguishes between the notion of a private and public dedication, stating that the “private dedicatee” is a person “to whom a work is dedicated in the name of a personal relationship: friendship, kinship, or other”, while “[t]he public dedicatee is a person who is more or less well known but with whom the author, by his dedication, indicates a relationship that is public in nature – intellectual, artistic, political, or other” (Genette 1997: 131). The two dedications to Adrian Conan Doyle obviously lean toward the latter.
5. See the back cover to the McGraw-Hill editions of *Basil and the Lost Colony* (1964) and *Basil in Mexico* (1976), and the “About the Author and Illustrator” pages in the Minstrel Books editions of the *Basil* books.
6. Granted, the fact that Titus was writing at a time when the name Basil Rathbone was synonymous with the name Sherlock Holmes (to the extent that she named her title character after the actor) implies that the Universal films influenced her vision to an extent, even as she demurely and self-deprecatingly emphasised the bond between her adaptation and the Doyle books.
7. *The Black Cauldron*, Disney’s twenty-fifth animated feature film, was loosely based on the works of fantasy author Lloyd Alexander. It was the most expensive animated film ever produced up to that point in time, costing a full \$25 million (Grant 1998: 311), but it did not even come close to recouping its production cost. To this day, the film is regarded as one of the studio’s more infamous failures, particularly given the initial hope that its effect on Disney animation would be analogous to that of the revolutionary *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) (Grant 1998: 311). John Grant defends the film in his Disney encyclopaedia, but it is unlikely that *The Black Cauldron* will ever be regarded as a misunderstood masterpiece (Grant 1998: 311-312). Though *The*

Great Mouse Detective is a far more traditional Disney film, the influence of *The Black Cauldron* on its successor can be felt in the animators' experimentation with new forms of animation such as CGI, and in the character of Fidget, who is modelled heavily on Creeper (the most memorable character from the earlier film).

8. Legendary Disney animators Ollie Johnston and Frank Thomas stressed characterisation as the true heart of any Disney film: "Constant action situations give no chance for the quiet sequences where audiences can fall in love with the characters. In our experience, a picture that attempted continuous excitement and dramatic tension never held the attention of the audience" (Johnston and Thomas 1981: 368). This philosophy reinforces the unsuitability of Holmes as a source for Disney adaptation given the centrality of incident and dramatic tension to the development of a detective story.
9. Holmes's one spoken line in *The Great Mouse Detective* is notably provided by Rathbone, as the studio utilised a recording of the (by then deceased) actor delivering Holmes's famous observation that German music "is introspective and I want to introspect" (Clements, Musker, Michener, and Mattinson 1986a: 22:51), voiced in 'The Red-Headed League' (1891) (Doyle 2003: 216).
10. Several of the artists, directors, and writers who helped facilitate that Renaissance, most notably John Musker and Ron Clements, worked on *The Great Mouse Detective*.
11. Katzenberg's desire to de-Anglicanise *The Great Mouse Detective* may have been due to his disappointments with a previous Holmesian project: *Young Sherlock Holmes* (1985). Mattinson recalls that "[Katzenberg] thought *Young Sherlock Holmes* was going to be one of the greatest pictures ever. He was telling us all about it when he came over to Disney [from Paramount], saying 'Oh, this is going to be a marvellous picture. If we can come up with half as much of that.' But that picture came out and it didn't do that well" (Mattinson 2012: n.p.). Mattinson maintains that this was the primary reason why Katzenberg promoted a more Americanised take on the Holmes mythos in *The Great Mouse Detective*, as "he felt that the Englishness of the film was going to be the downfall of the picture" (Mattinson 2012: n.p.). Despite Disney's reputation for cultural usurpation, *The Great Mouse Detective* remains one of the most pronouncedly English films in Disney's animated canon; it eschews the traditional Americanisation of English sources as exemplified by *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), *Peter Pan* (1953), *The Jungle Book* (1967), and *Robin Hood* (1973).

-
12. The recreation of Victorian London was central to the creative team's vision, as the 'Making Of' scrapbook on the Disney DVD contains several pages of concept art depicting various Victorian era buildings, alleyways, and cityscapes.
 13. This Victorian streak would continue through *The Great Mouse Detective's* immediate successor, *Oliver & Company* (1988), a modernised adaptation of *Oliver Twist* (1837).
 14. Anthropomorphic animals have featured prominently in Disney films from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) onward, though the depiction of such characters has varied widely between films. *Snow White* and *Cinderella* both have 'animal friends', but *Snow White's* forest animals are anthropomorphised to a far lesser degree than *Cinderella's* mice. *Bambi* (1942), though distinguished by its naturalistic depiction of the animal characters and the forest setting, likewise anthropomorphises the characters to make them more relatable. In the case of *The Great Mouse Detective*, the depiction of the animal characters is most analogous to *The Rescuers* (1977), with both films depicting a society of anthropomorphised mice who operate beneath the surface of human society (also see note 19).
 15. Though hand-drawn animation, as a medium, lends itself to dynamic experimentation with movement and characterisation, it is also a financially and temporally costly medium, which can hinder such experimentation, particularly in the case of full-length feature films. Furthermore, Disney's emphasis on realism and detail in its animated films prompted the use of rotoscoping, which involves tracing over recorded footage; once the animated version of the physical action has been traced, the animation itself (as opposed to the live-action original) could theoretically be referenced as a source for identical scenes in subsequent films. Hence, the obvious duplication of character bits and gestures in various Disney films, particularly those from the 1960s and 70s: when Sir Ector accidentally hits Kay on the head in *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), the characters' movements are patterned on Horace and Jasper's interactions in *One Hundred and One Dalmatians* (1961); when Mowgli is playfully tackled by his wolf brothers in *The Jungle Book* (1967), the character's movements are based on Wart's interactions with Ector's dogs in *The Sword in the Stone*; when Little John and Lady Kluck dance together in *Robin Hood* (1973), their dance steps are duplications of Baloo and King Louie's dance in *The Jungle Book*. Setting aside the issue of movement, the basic visual appeal of certain characters' designs, and the enduring influence of the Nine Old Men (the core group of Disney animators who contributed

immeasurably to the success of Walt Disney's animated feature films: Les Clark, Wolfgang Reitherman, Eric Larson, Ward Kimball, Milt Kahl, Frank Thomas, Ollie Johnston, John Lounsbery, and Marc Davis) throughout the history of Disney animation, promoted the reuse of successful templates.

16. In keeping with this approach, the Disney film uses humanised names for the characters rather than simply referring to them by their species: Rat is Ratty (though this nickname is used in the Grahame text), Mole is Moley, Toad is J. Thaddeus 'Toady' Toad, and Badger is Angus MacBadger.
17. In a noteworthy inversion of the Rathbone/Bruce pairing, Ratty is given a moustache while Moley is clean-shaven.
18. Two sisters with the surname Faversham appear briefly in *Basil and the Lost Colony*, and two little-girl mice, Angela and Agatha, are featured in *Basil of Baker Street*, but none of these characters are as central to the narrative as Olivia, nor do they serve as stand-ins for the child reader.
19. As noted, the film actually owes more of a debt to *Ichabod and Mr. Toad* (1949) than to any of Disney's 'mouse films'. Traditionally, Disney mouse characters were presented as endearing friends to the protagonist: Timothy Q. Mouse is Dumbo's chief defender in *Dumbo* (1941), while Jaq and Gus play similar roles in *Cinderella* (1950). The specific notion of a mouse detective had actually been explored previously in two of *The Great Mouse Detective's* most noteworthy forebears. In *The Aristocats* (1970), Roquefort the mouse is charged with locating the title characters; whilst conducting his investigation, he dons a deerstalker cap. Similarly, *The Rescuers* (1977), loosely adapted from Margery Sharp's *Miss Bianca* books, presents the two lead mouse characters as investigators. As such, the basic premise of the Titus text undoubtedly seemed familiar territory for the creative team, though the overtly Holmesian elements of Titus's series added a unique dimension to the notion of a mouse detective. Whereas Bernard and Bianca are depicted as amateurs embarking on their first case together, Basil is the consummate professional. Furthermore, Bernard and Bianca interact with human characters throughout the film, while Basil and his companions never cross paths with humans. Finally, Bernard and Bianca, though highly anthropomorphised, are more mouse than human, especially in comparison to the characters in *The Great Mouse Detective*. The mice in *The Rescuers* are furrier, their tails, whiskers, and ears are more pronounced, and their clothing is simple in comparison to the elaborate Victorian costumes featured in *The Great Mouse Detective*. It is further worth noting that *The Rescuers* repeatedly puts forth the aforementioned traditional moral of 'mouse fables' about little people

-
- making a big difference. The later film, in keeping with its rejection of traditional anthropomorphism, eschews this message.
20. Much as Disney has turned the 'Disney villain' into a successful brand name, placing characters such as the Queen, Captain Hook, Maleficent, and Cruella de Vil in new stories and contexts, neo-Victorian works have relied heavily on a 'brand name' rogues gallery made up of Victorian literary/historical figures, including Dracula, Jack the Ripper, Mr. Hyde, Dorian Gray, and of course, Professor Moriarty.
 21. Holmes refers to Moriarty as "the Napoleon of crime" (Doyle 2003: 559) in 'The Final Problem' (1893).
 22. When it looks as though Ratigan may triumph, Basil laments that "the empire is doomed" (Clements, Musker, Michener, and Mattinson 1986a: 53:54).
 23. Titus's Ratigan also has royal aspirations, but his target is the throne of the fictional nation of Bengistan, as featured in both *Basil and the Lost Colony* (1964) and *Basil and the Pygmy Cats* (1971).
 24. Basil is ultimately more affable than Holmes, though the film humorously emphasises that he has very little patience for children; while Basil is warm and friendly toward Dawson for the majority of the movie, he remains distant toward Olivia until the latter part of the film (which underscores that the child viewer is not meant to identify with the title character). Naturally, Basil eschews Holmes's most controversial and self-destructive eccentricity, namely his drug abuse, though he is surprisingly presented as a smoker; like Holmes, he lights his pipe when pondering a particularly difficult problem, and he is also seen smoking a cigarette late in the film.
 25. The title card for *The Great Mouse Detective*, as displayed during the film's opening credits, reads *The Adventures of the Great Mouse Detective* (Clements, Musker, Michener, and Mattinson 1986a: 2:42). Moreover, the film was actually called *Basil of Baker Street* throughout the entirety of its development, and it was originally set to be released under this name, though Katzenberg eventually insisted that it be changed, claiming that the final title was more marketable. To this day, Hulett and Mattinson prefer the original title, and Hulett recounts that "[t]he animation department hated the change. One of the story guys wrote this memo, which developed some notoriety of its own. The whole gist of this memo was, 'Oh, well, we're changing the name of *Basil of Baker Street* to *The Great Mouse Detective*. Now we're going to go back and change the names of the old pictures. So, *Pinocchio* (1940) is now going to be called *The Little Wooden Boy Who is Alive*, and *Dumbo* (1941) is going to be *The Little Elephant Who Could Fly*'" (Hulett 2012: n.p.).

Bibliography

- Anderson, Ken. 1973-1974. 'Robin Hood', *Official Bulletin of the International Alliance of Theatrical Stage Employees and Moving Picture Machine Operators in the United States and Canada* (Winter): 24-27.
- Burnham Bloom, Abigail and Mary Sanders Pollock (eds.). 2011. *Victorian Literature and Film Adaptation*. Amherst: Cambria Press.
- Doyle, Adrian Conan. 1958. Letter to Eve Titus, repr. in Titus, Eve, *Basil and the Pygmy Cats*. New York: McGraw Hill Book Co., n.p.
- Doyle, Arthur Conan. 2003. 'The Final Problem', in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, vol. 1. New York: Barnes and Noble, 557-570.
- . 2003. 'The Man with the Twisted Lip', in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, vol. 1. New York: Barnes and Noble, 273-290.
- . 2003. 'The Red-headed League', in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, vol. 1. New York: Barnes and Noble, 206-224.
- . 1991. 'Sherlock Holmes on the Screen', in Oriel, Harold (ed.), *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: Interviews and Recollections*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 79-83.
- Daston, Lorraine and Gregg Mitman. 2005. 'The How and Why of Thinking with Animals', in Daston, Lorraine and Gregg Mitman (eds.), *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1-14.
- Genette, Gérard. 1997. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Grant, John. 1998. *Encyclopedia of Walt Disney's Animated Characters*, rev. edn. New York: Hyperion.
- Hadley, Louisa. 2010. *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*. Houndmills, Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Heilmann, Ann and Mark Llewellyn. 2010. *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009*. Houndmills, Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hulett, Steve. 2012. Personal interview (08 March).
- Hutcheon, Linda. 2006. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York: Routledge.
- Johnston, Ollie and Frank Thomas. 1981. *Disney Animation: The Illusion of Life*. New York: Abbeville Press.

-
- Leitch, Thomas. 2007. *Film Adaptation and its Discontents: From Gone with the Wind to The Passion of the Christ*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- . 2011. 'Jekyll, Hyde, Jekyll, Hyde, Jekyll, Hyde, Jekyll, Hyde: Four Models of Intertextuality'. In Burnham Bloom and Pollock (2011): 27-49.
- Mattinson, Burny. 2012. Personal interview (20 March).
- McKuras, Julie. 2001. 'Basil of Baker Street', *Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections* 5:1: 1-6.
- Mitchell, Kate. 2010. *History and Cultural Memory in Neo-Victorian Fiction: Victorian Afterimages*. Houndmills, Basingstoke & New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Palmer, Landon. 2013. 'Saving Mr. Disney: The Conflicting Arts of Adaptation and Brand Management', FilmSchoolRejects.com, <http://filmschoolrejects.com/features/saving-mr-disney-the-conflicting-arts-of-adaptation-and-brand-management.php> (accessed 31 December 2013).
- Rathbone, Basil. 1962. *In and Out of Character*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.
- Ross, Deborah. 2000. 'Home by Tea-time: Fear of Imagination in Disney's *Alice in Wonderland*', in Cartmell, Deborah, I.Q. Hunter, Heidi Kaye and Imelda Whelehan (eds.), *Classics in Film and Fiction*. Sterling, Virginia: Pluto Press, 207-227.
- Sanders, Julie. 2006. *Adaptation and Appropriation*. New York: Routledge.
- Schickel, Richard. 1968. *The Disney Version*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Titus, Eve. 1958. *Basil of Baker Street*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.
- . 1964. *Basil and the Lost Colony*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.
- . 1971. *Basil and the Pygmy Cats*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.
- . 1976. *Basil in Mexico*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.
- . 1990. *Basil in the Wild West*. New York: Minstrel Books.
- Wagner, Tamara S. 2011. 'Transposing Sherlock Holmes across Time, Space and Genre'. In Burnham Bloom and Pollock (2011): 205-223.

Filmography

- Clements, Ron, John Musker, Dave Michener, and Burny Mattinson (dirs.). 2002. *The Great Mouse Detective* [1986a]. Perf. Vincent Price, Barrie Ingham, Val Bettin. Disney Home Video. DVD.

-
- . ‘The Making of *The Great Mouse Detective*’ [1986b]. In Clements, Musker, Michener, and Mattinson (2002). Disney Home Video, 0:00-7:52. DVD.
- Hancock, John Lee (dir.). 2013. Official theatrical trailer #1 for *Saving Mr. Banks*. Walt Disney Studios, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5kYmrjongg> (accessed 30 December 2013).
- Kinney, Jack, Clyde Geronimi, and James Algar (dirs.). 2000. *The Adventures of Ichabod and Mr. Toad* [1949]. Perf. Basil Rathbone, Bing Crosby. Disney Home Video. DVD.
- Mattinson, Burny (dir.). 2005. ‘Mickey’s Christmas Carol’ [1983]. Perf. Allan Young, Wayne Allwine, Clarence Nash. *Walt Disney’s Classic Cartoon Favorites, Volume 9: Classic Holiday Stories*. Disney Home Video. DVD.