

Representations of Masculinity in Neo-Victorian Film and Television

Jamil Mustafa

(Lewis University, Illinois, USA)

Abstract:

Beginning with the premise that neo-Victorian films and television programmes set in the late-Victorian era offer especially rich objects of study for those interested in gender and sexuality, this article explores how masculinity is constructed and problematised in *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), *Crimson Peak* (2015), *Ripper Street* (2012-2016), and *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016). These representations of masculinity are marked by uncanniness, pervasive tensions, and liberatory possibilities, and enriched by generic and visual features. They depict the public sphere as the principal site for masculinity's definition and expression, while linking voyeurism with violence and investigating how distinctions between England and America influence masculine identity and desire. As these representations critique the masculine valorisation of exploration and conquest, they demonstrate how men's success in the public sphere is undercut by failure in the private one. They thereby make familiar markers of manliness unfamiliar, and empower women. By portraying men who both exemplify and cope with the many dimensions and ever-changing nature of masculinity, *Sherlock Holmes*, *Crimson Peak*, *Ripper Street*, and *Penny Dreadful* address twenty-first-century viewers whose world has been changed by significant shifts in gender roles and responsibilities, thus enabling men cathartically to experience and resolve a return of repressed anxieties about what it means to be a man.

Keywords: *Crimson Peak*, gender, masculinity, neo-Victorian, *Penny Dreadful*, *Ripper Street*, *Sherlock Holmes*, the uncanny.

Neo-Victorian films and television shows have followed the neo-Victorian novel's foray into "the Victorian sexscape" (Kohlke 2008: 53), mapping an erotic terra incognita for curious viewers, while generally succeeding in rendering with complexity and sensitivity how humanity is bound up with sex, sexuality, and gender. Arguably, and not accidentally, the richest of these depictions take place in settings of the 1880s and 1890s, "when all the laws that governed sexual identity and behavior seemed to be breaking down" (Showalter 1990: 3), and when compelling cultural and

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socioeconomic forces were redefining masculinity and femininity. Although neo-Victorian representations of sexuality and gender have proliferated for some time, scholars have only recently begun to address how these works portray masculinity in general and late-Victorian masculinity in particular. As Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn, the editors of a recent special issue of *Victoriographies on Neo-Victorian Masculinities* note, “engagement with neo-Victorian masculinity has been sparse”, despite the fact that “the ambiguity of what masculinity represented in the 1880s and 1890s” helps make contemporary depictions of late-Victorian men a region “rich for exploration” (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2015: 98, 99). To help investigate this site, I will focus on two films and two television programmes situated at the *fin de siècle*: *Sherlock Holmes* (2009), set in 1890 London; *Crimson Peak* (2015), which takes place in 1887 and 1901 Buffalo, New York, and in 1901 Cumberland; *Ripper Street* (2012-2016), the plot of which runs from 1889 through 1899, again mainly set in London; and *Penny Dreadful* (2014-2016), set in 1891 and 1892 London, with occasional expeditions into the West Country moors and the Wild West. While constructing and problematising masculinity, these works reveal its uncanny essence, pervasive tensions, and liberatory possibilities.

These texts at once depict and interrogate “hegemonic masculinity”,¹ which involves “heterosexuality, the subordination of women, authority, aggression, and technical knowledge” (Cavender 1999: 159). Such masculinity is configured according to the separate-spheres ideology of the Victorian period, within which “men were expected to go out into the world in order to earn a living”, while also “act[ing] in a domestic context as governors of their families, protecting and comforting their wives” (Shoemaker 2013: 30). *Sherlock Holmes* and *Ripper Street* feature the male detective, who functions as “an idealized representation of hegemonic masculinity” and who “exhibits intelligence, skill, daring, and often physical prowess” (Cavender 1999: 161). *Penny Dreadful* and *Crimson Peak*, while also involving male detectives, focus upon more outré male explorers and inventors. Moreover, whereas the former works debunk or exclude the supernatural,² the latter showcase it. Thus, while all four texts might be considered hybrids, the former fit more comfortably into the genre of the detective film; the latter, into that of the Gothic.³ These generic distinctions are meaningful, for the Gothic offers especially potent opportunities to transgress gender norms. More generally, the Gothic features the uncanny,

and neo-Victorian (re)constructions of both Victorian and contemporary masculinity are, like neo-Victorianism itself, essentially (un)familiar. Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham's claims for the uncanniness of the neo-Victorian novel are easily extrapolated, since any form of neo-Victorian narrative "represents a 'double' of the Victorian text", involves "the conscious repetition of tropes, characters, and historical events", often "defamiliarizes our preconceptions of Victorian society", and acts as "a ghostly visitor from the past that infiltrates our present" (Arias and Pulham 2010: xv). Accordingly, though representations of masculinity in all of these works are closely related, *Penny Dreadful* and *Crimson Peak* portray manliness as more spectacularly and disconcertingly problematic than do *Sherlock Holmes* and *Ripper Street*.

Together with generic questions, we should keep in mind key issues of visual analysis. While these onscreen texts function as do fictional print media to the extent that they rely upon narrative structures and conventions to convey particular themes, their visuality is crucial – both to their neo-Victorian character and to how they delineate masculinity. As Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss point out, "[m]any of the prominent theoretical elements of neo-Victorianism, including nostalgia, fetishism, the trace and spectrality, adaptation and historiographic metafiction", depend upon both material and "visual aspects"; and, given that "the spectre is visible but not tangible, adaptation readjusts our perspective on texts of the past," and "historiographic metafiction entails a reflection on the past" (Boehm-Schnitker and Gruss 2011: 1). Their observation underscores not only the importance of the meticulously arranged and densely packed (neo-) Victorian mise en scène in each of the works I am considering, but also the ways in which *Penny Dreadful* and *Crimson Peak* diverge from *Sherlock Holmes* and *Ripper Street* by combining neo-Victorian verisimilitude with distinctively Gothic visual effects. Moreover, and more to my thesis, these works deploy methods such as visual punning, slow motion, crosscutting, and strategically subjective camera shots to advance their interpretation and interrogation of masculinity.

1. Masculinity in the Public Sphere

In the films and television programmes alike, the public sphere is the principal site for masculinity's definition and expression. Detective Inspector Edmund Reid (Matthew Macfadyen) of *Ripper Street* spends most

of his time in public, at the police station, at the Brown Bear pub, or on the streets of Whitechapel. His privileging of the public over the private sphere is emphasised in 'I Need Light' (2012), when he announces to his wife, Emily (Amanda Hale), "I am home for a shirt," and she responds, "And now you go back" (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 21:46-21:49). As she assists him to change shirts, the camera reveals his burned torso, scarred from an accident on the Thames in which their daughter, Mathilda, was lost – a private casualty of Reid's public hunt for Jack the Ripper. The scene is reprised in 'The King Came Calling' (2013), this time transposed from the private to the public sphere. Reid stands on the banks of the Thames, where he is conducting an experiment in which the bagged bodies of slaughtered pigs, similar in weight to those of murdered women, are monitored in their progress along the river. As he explains his scientific method to the sceptical Inspector Sydney Ressler of the City (Patrick Baladi), he again changes his shirt and reveals his scars. The simultaneous revelation of two key aspects of Reid's masculinity – his professional acumen and his work-related injuries – contrasts with Ressler's comparative effeminacy, which is signified by his obtuseness, careful dress, and concern for the cleanliness of his boots. Reid and Ressler's exchange begins a series of jurisdictional disputes wherein masculinity and effeminacy are mapped onto the East and West Ends of London. Reid and Sergeant Bennet Drake (Jerome Flynn) enter the City to investigate the death of Algernon Winston (Oddie Braddell), an obese banker whose private life involved not only keeping a mistress to whip and depilate him, but also dressing in drag and patronising a gay brothel. A "City man" and a "fat man" who is "[p]ink, like a pig" (Wilson, Croghan, and Warlow 2013a: 8:59, 15:20, 13:07), Algernon is aligned with West-End decadence, Oscar Wilde's double-life-leading Algernon Moncrieff, the fleshy Wilde himself, and the porcine subjects of Reid's experiment – shots of which animals, as they are butchered and bagged, are crosscut with those of Algernon stumbling through the street moments before his death. This alignment extends to the prostitutes, whose bodies are interchangeable with those of the pigs, and it includes the transvestites working at the gay brothel, one of whom claws Ressler's face. The prominent scratch on the latter's cheek, which mark he dabs with the same handkerchief that he uses to cover his mouth when faced with the sick denizens of Whitechapel, contrasts with the scars on Reid's torso and indicates Ressler's relative effeminacy. Recognising his own inadequacy,

Ressler soon effectively surrenders his authority to Reid, whom he is content to assist in the investigation.

The detectives' struggle for dominance, and similar figurative and literal fights between men throughout the series, is foreshadowed by the bare-knuckle boxing match near the opening of 'I Need Light', in which Drake poses as a boxer-for-hire and Reid as his backer in order to entrap Joseph Smeaton (Geoff Bell), an organiser of such illicit bouts. In 1889, when the episode takes place, "the viciousness of bare-knuckle fights made them illegal" (Horrall 2001: 124). Two years later, when the National Sporting Club opened in 1891, "[p]ugilism was replaced by modern boxing," and the once-"brutal" fights came to enjoy "middle-class respectability" (Horrall 2001: 124), as boxing "was on course to become not merely respectable but even praiseworthy, a medium for the expression of that favourite Victorian pseudo-virtue, manliness" (Brailsford 1988: 158). Boxing, like so many aspects of late-Victorian masculinity, was undergoing a profound transformation. This liminal moment is depicted in both *Ripper Street* and *Sherlock Holmes*, though the former's treatment of it is more sophisticated. While Reid and Smeaton watch Drake fight, Reid remarks, "Fighters, whores. If flesh is what you seek, there's no shortage in these parts" (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 1:11-1:14). His provocative observation elides distinctions between pugilists and prostitutes – and, even more fundamentally, between men and women. These elisions are illustrated by crosscuts between the boxing match and a walking tour of Jack the Ripper's haunts. The match ends with Drake's battered body on the ground; the tour, with a 'ripped' woman's body on the street. Both bodies are presented as spectacles to be gazed at by diegetic and extradiegetic audiences alike. The association of fighters, streetwalkers, voyeurism, and violence is reinforced when Reid and Drake consult a chart that connects the cases of Jack the Ripper, Joseph Smeaton, and the murder victim Maude Thwaites (Sarah Gallagher); and when, during a second boxing match, Drake spots in the audience Sir Arthur Donaldson (Mark Dexter), a depraved aristocrat who has produced a proto-snuff film in which he murders the part-time prostitute Thwaites. Donaldson's delectation in observing the potentially deadly match is mirrored by his voyeuristic enjoyment of an orgy involving prostitutes, one of whom, Rose Erskine (Charlene McKenna), he later attempts to garrote. Earlier shots of the post-coital Rose as she rises from the previous night's orgy are crosscut with

shots of Donaldson's eyes as seen through the lattice screen from behind which he observes her, and with subjective shots from Donaldson's point of view. The editing, and the visual pun linking the aristocrat's screen with our own, implicate us in his dangerous voyeurism, while adding a meta level to the scene: we watch him onscreen watching Rose through a screen, as he and we prepare for his attack on her.

Sherlock Holmes draws attention to the eponymous detective's manly nonconformity by having him engage in and profit from, rather than prosecute, an illegal bare-knuckle brawl. In the middle of his fight, Holmes (Robert Downey Jr.), like Drake, focuses upon an audience member – in this instance, not a man but a woman, Irene Adler (Rachel McAdams), who later serves, like Watson's fiancée Mary Morstan (Kelly Reilly) in the preceding scene, to triangulate and heterosexualise the two men's relationship.⁴ In contrast with the more transgressive *Ripper Street*, *Sherlock Holmes* brings femininity into a profoundly masculine arena not to align but to oppose the genders. The film does so in an attempt to recast the detective – whose reputation precedes Downey's incarnation, and whose masculinity is imperilled by his bachelorhood, apparent asexuality, and closeness with Watson (see Bragg 2009: 3-4) – as a man whose fists are nearly as formidable as his brain. Indeed, these body parts work in concert. The boxing scene, one of several in which Holmes and Watson demonstrate their fighting skills, is less interesting as an authentication of virility than as a means by which two key aspects of hegemonic masculinity, physical aggression and intellectual prowess, are linked. This connection originates in *The Sign of (the) Four* (1890), in which Holmes encounters the boxer-turned-bodyguard McMurdo, with whom he “fought three rounds,” and who praises his “cross-hit” (Doyle 1960: 106). “You might have aimed high, if you had joined the fancy”, McMurdo tells Holmes, who observes, “I have still one of the scientific professions open to me” (Doyle 1960: 106). The adjective is telling, given that Arthur Conan Doyle, a boxer and boxing enthusiast, “immersed himself in ‘pugilistica’ – the science and history of boxing” (Stashower 1999: 192), and that the detective-pugilist of *Sherlock Holmes* takes a decidedly cerebral approach to boxing. In both the fight scene and the film's opening scene, in which Holmes and Watson battle the henchmen of their antagonist, Lord Blackwood (Mark Strong), Holmes, the “calculating machine” (Doyle 1960: 96), plans each move with precision. The detective explains, in voiceover, the sequence, targets, and logic of his

envisioned attack, which is executed in slow motion and then replayed at normal speed.

Penny Dreadful employs ratting instead of boxing to explore masculinity in the public sphere. In ‘Demimonde’ (2014), Ethan Chandler (Josh Hartnett), Brona Croft (Billie Piper), Vanessa Ives (Eva Green), and Dorian Gray (Reeve Carney) watch a melodrama at the Grand Guignol theatre featuring a werewolf who slashes the blood-spewing throat of his beloved. Brona, a consumptive prostitute, departs from the performance and ends her doomed relationship with Ethan, telling him, “You’re fucking a skeleton every night!” (Walsh and Logan 2014: 41:58-42:02). She then collapses in the street, coughing up blood. Leaving Vanessa at the theatre, Dorian and the despairing Ethan begin a boys’ night out. They arrive at a rat pit in a pub, where Ethan is overwhelmed by the gory spectacle of a dog’s tearing out the throats of dozens of rats and becomes involved in a fight with four toffs. Dorian and Ethan end their evening at the former’s home, where they drink absinthe and Dorian plays the ‘Liebestod’ from *Tristan und Isolde* (1859), explaining the idea of “love-death” (Walsh and Logan 2014: 55:55). Ethan experiences flashbacks of the evening, and of scenes from the first two episodes of the season in which he seems to have committed Ripper-like killings. He approaches Dorian, grabs him by the throat, and kisses him violently before tearing away his shirt. Dorian reciprocates, and the men are shown kissing more tenderly before the scene fades to black.

This sequence typifies the multiform nature of masculinity in *Penny Dreadful*, as it interweaves performativity, passion, violence, homosociality, homosexuality, Eros and Thanatos, repression, and the return of the repressed. Ethan, we will later discover, is a werewolf who has been killing women as newspaper headlines blare, “IS JACK BACK?” (Walsh and Logan 2014: 3:02). Ethan strives in vain to repress his lycanthropy, which functions as a metaphor for both lust and bloodlust. His inner struggle is articulated – aptly, in doggerel – by his onstage doppelgänger: “I fight with manly fortitude. / My spirit still would love exude. / But there grows within a mighty beast / That strains and yearns for quick release” (Walsh and Logan 2014: 36:15-36:28). Ethan understandably identifies with Flash Jack, the Ripper-like dog in the rat pit, with whom he is associated in ‘Séance’ (2014), when he awakens from a transformation to see rats around him, and again in ‘Perpetual Night’ (2016) when, in werewolf form, he slaughters a

crowd of vampires closely related to rats. These familiar motifs, well within the realm of hegemonic masculinity, are queered and rendered uncanny when Ethan is linked not just with the dog/wolf but with the rat, calling his manliness into question. His fight with the four toffs begins well for him but ends with their pummelling him to the floor, as scenes of their combat are crosscut with those of the rat pit. Later, Dorian, a consummate art aficionado who describes Flash Jack as “an artist” (Walsh and Logan 2014: 46:29), suggests that Ethan’s cultural naïveté and rough machismo constitute an artistic performance. “You play your part to perfection, Mr Chandler”, Dorian tells him. “Rude mechanical. Rugged Westerner” (Walsh and Logan 2014: 50:16-50:27). Dorian’s reference to the play-within-a-play of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* further associates Ethan with rats by way of the Frankenstein monster, who works as a “stage rat” (Walsh and Logan 2014: 20:15) at the Grand Guignol theatre. It also stresses the mimetic quality of the werewolf melodrama, whose bloody climax uncannily echoes and foreshadows the werewolf Ethan’s slashing of women’s throats in ‘Night Work’ (2014) and in ‘And They Were Enemies’ (2015).

Most significantly, Dorian’s remark reveals that Ethan’s machismo is an instance of gender performativity. No longer top dog, Ethan is linked by Dorian to Bottom, the rude mechanical of Shakespeare’s play who transforms from man to beast, in what appears to be the screenwriter’s sly way of indicating the sexual role that Ethan will play in his encounter with Dorian. This role is later confirmed by an omniscient, demon-controlled Vanessa in ‘Possession’ (2014). “Did you fuck him, or did he fuck you?” she asks Ethan. “He fucked you, didn’t he?” (Hawkes and Logan 2014: 17:04-17:18). Ethan’s transgressive gender performativity is reprised and amplified by Angelique, the crossdressing male prostitute whose bottoming for Dorian in ‘Above the Vaulted Sky’ (2015) is depicted explicitly rather than merely suggested. One of the many noteworthy aspects of Dorian’s relationship with Angelique is that it comprises both the private and public spheres. In ‘Glorious Horrors’ (2015), he throws her a coming-out ball, and in ‘Evil Spirits in Heavenly Places’ (2015), he relishes that their strolling the streets is “raising a few eyebrows” (Thomas and Logan 2015b: 27:53-27:55). After Angelique extols “[b]eing who we want to be, not who we are” (Thomas and Logan 2015b: 31:44-31:45), they kiss openly in a table-tennis parlour – for Dorian, to whom “provocation is food and drink” (Thomas and Logan 2015b: 28:00), seeks an impressionable audience for

his partner's gender-bending performances. The already mentioned 'Demimonde' episode, like the boxing, murder, and orgy scenes of 'I Need Light', likewise emphasises the spectacular nature of sexual performativity, both thematically and visually. Before Ethan and Dorian begin drinking absinthe, they are alternately shown in objective shots and framed together in the latter's bathroom mirror, while Dorian explains how each of his colognes creates "a different you" (Walsh and Logan 2014: 50:26). As images and selves multiply, these shots underscore both the superficial nature of (sexual) identity and the potential for exchanging or merging bodies. A medium shot of Dorian opening a bottle of fragrance is followed immediately by a closeup of him opening a bottle of absinthe, with the camerawork signifying that both potions could realise Ethan's wish to "be someone else" (Walsh and Logan 2014: 42:58), to perform a different sexual role.

The separation of spheres and the demarcation of genders appear more stable in the opening scenes of *Crimson Peak*, in which Sir Thomas Sharpe (Tom Hiddleston) struggles and fails to prove his masculinity in the homosocial public sphere of Buffalo, New York. As he demonstrates his clay-mining device to the successful and sceptical American businessman Carter Cushing (Jim Beaver) and his male colleagues, Sir Thomas describes how his family's "mines have been royal purveyors of the purest scarlet clay since 1796", but concedes that "[e]xcessive mining in the last twenty years has caused most of our old deposits to collapse" (Del Toro 2015: 9:09-9:14, 9:23-9:27). Throughout the film, this red clay is interchangeable with blood; thus, his words imply that the pure blood and purebloods of the Old World have been exhausted, and that they require a New-World transfusion of blood and infusion of capital. In America, accordingly, the serial groom Sir Thomas pursues both dollars and a(nother) bride. "We've been dead for years, Lucille" (Del Toro 2015: 1:42:25), Sir Thomas later admits to his sister (Jessica Chastain); but Cushing – whose surname evokes the vampire-hunter of Hammer films, Peter Cushing – needs no such admission to sense the siblings' vampiric nature, and to drive them away from his daughter Edith. Seeking to emasculate Sir Thomas and thereby render him less attractive to Edith, Cushing asks whether the baronet has a "full-scale" harvester that has been tested (Del Toro 2015: 9:51). When Sir Thomas admits that he does not, Cushing sneers, "So actually what you have is a toy and some fancy words" (Del Toro 2015: 9:54-9:58). To follow this

castrating stroke, he tells the baronet, “You’ve got the softest hands I’ve ever felt” (Del Toro 2015: 10:46-10:48). Cushing’s own choice for his daughter, Dr Alan McMichael (Charlie Hunnam), contrasts with Sir Thomas in every respect: not reserved but robust; not brown-haired but blond; not artful but plainspoken; and, perhaps most importantly, not English but American. As Cushing emphasises to Sir Thomas after dismissing his presentation, “In America we bank on effort, not privilege” (Del Toro 2015: 10:51-10:54). This opposition is reiterated at the dance, when Dr McMichael and Sir Thomas meet. By admitting to his rival, “I must confess, I had a little trouble understanding your title” (Del Toro 2015: 17:55-17:58), McMichael signals not ignorance but superiority. His own medical title results from effort and education, whereas a baronetcy is an inherited gift. In seeking to understand Sir Thomas’s title, McMichael begins an investigation into the baronet’s past that culminates in discoveries of bigamy and murder. That the doctor will act as a detective is evident when Edith remarks upon his owning a book by Arthur Conan Doyle. “Fancy yourself a detective?” she asks. “Not really”, he responds. “But he is an ophthalmologist, just like me” (Del Toro 2015: 22:26-22:32).⁵ Her word choice dismisses McMichael’s life-saving investigative work as fanciful and perhaps effeminate. In contrast, his alignment of medicine and detection underscores the scientific essence of both fields, thereby reinforcing their association not only with hegemonic masculinity, but also with the penetrative and revelatory masculine gaze. It is no surprise that the intrepid American, McMichael, eventually supplants the effete Englishman, Sir Thomas, for central to the latter’s emasculation in the public sphere are his nationality and class, which serve as interchangeable signs of his impotence, degeneracy, and alienness.

2. Transatlantic Masculinities

Both *Crimson Peak* and the other narratives being examined connect representations of masculinity with distinctions between England and America. In ‘I Need Light’, Edmund Reid’s colleague, Homer Jackson (Adam Rothenberg), is introduced and initially defined simply as “the American” (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 7:17). Later, Reid explains that Jackson is a former Pinkerton agent and US Army surgeon. We thus discover that he – like Reid himself, McMichael in *Crimson Peak*, Holmes and Watson in *Sherlock*, and, to a lesser extent, Victor Frankenstein (Harry

Treadaway) in *Penny Dreadful* – is at once a detective and a scientist, both of which roles underpin his masculinity. We initially see Jackson, however, as neither a detective nor a scientist, but as a lover with possibly problematic sexual tastes. Observed in a brothel bedroom through a peephole by his wife Long Susan (MyAnna Buring), who is also the madam, he is shown performing oral sex on Rose Erskine. When the latter objects that their roles are “topsy-turvy”, he dismisses her concern as prudish: “Now, Rose, I have told you. There are no rules here” (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 7:09-7:16). In this moment, the American’s progressive – though not (yet) transgressive – heterosexuality is on illicit display, both to Long Susan and to us. Objective and subjective shots alternate, and we are once more, as in ‘I Need Light’, implicated in voyeurism. In an overhead shot in a subsequent scene, when Jackson acts as a surgeon-detective, his head again appears directly above the pelvis of a prostitute, that of the murdered Maude Thwaites, whose corpse he dissects in order to deduce that she taught violin and lived in a London suburb. By evoking Jackson’s predilection for cunnilingus, and by associating it with a dead woman’s body, this shot subtly connects his own somewhat unorthodox sexual tastes to the more extreme predilections of Maude’s killer, the voyeur and sex-murderer Sir Arthur Donaldson.

Even more ominously, Jackson’s scenes with Maude link him to Jack the Ripper. When Chief Inspector Abberline (Clive Russell), who led the investigation into the Ripper, barges in on Jackson at work, he points to “her guts” as evidence that the infamous killer has returned (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 17:26). Reid corrects him: “Her abdomen was opened fresh right here, as part of the autopsy conducted by Homer Jackson” (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 17:26-17:31). Reid’s observation, like Jackson’s suggestive surname, indicates that Jackson is the Ripper’s figurative progeny rather than the murderer himself. Their kinship is reinforced by Jackson’s asking Drake to “[g]et [Maude] naked”, and his admonishing the sergeant to treat her more gently: “What are those, hands or meat hooks?” (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 10:16-10:32). Jackson’s remarks, together with his joke that the gelatine he discovers under Maude’s fingernails is “from a meat pie” (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 11:11-11:12), align forensic investigation, butchery, sexual intercourse, and what Richard von Krafft-Ebing would later term “Lust-Murder” (Krafft-Ebing 1894: 62). This alignment comes to include voyeurism, homosexuality, and pornography

when we consider that the gelatine on the victim's thigh is not from a meat pie but "from a photographer's plate" (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 30:30-30:35), and that Long Susan's spying on Jackson and Rose through a peephole anticipates not only Sir Arthur's watching an orgy through a lattice screen and his photographer's filming him having sex with and killing Maude, but also the blackmailer Mr Self's viewing and photographing the journalist Fred Best and his lover Harry through a peephole in 'Threads of Silk and Gold' (2013). As this extensive network of motifs demonstrates, Homer Jackson, like Ethan Chandler, profoundly complicates the stereotype of the unambiguously heterosexual, rugged, and macho American man. That said, their relative anomalousness is a function of the different genres they inhabit. In keeping with the generic distinction between the detective and Gothic modes, whereas Jackson is accused but eventually acquitted of being the Ripper by Abberline in 'A Man of My Company' (2013) and 'What Use Our Work?' (2013), Ethan is in fact a lycanthropic serial killer whose inner beast is both figurative and literal.

The American in *Sherlock Holmes* is not a man but a woman, Irene Adler of New Jersey, whose sexuality, while perhaps less complex than that of Homer Jackson or Ethan Chandler, is nonetheless intriguing. The film provides her and Holmes with a romantic past, thereby departing dramatically from 'A Scandal in Bohemia' (1891), wherein Watson makes clear that the detective feels no "emotion akin to love for Irene Adler" (Doyle 1960: 160). In the film, Watson perceives how Adler exploits Holmes, and his speculations on her potential uses for the detective are both distinctly unromantic and weirdly gender bending. "What could she possibly need?" he asks the detective. "An alibi? A beard? A human canoe?" (Ritchie 2009: 32:22-32:33).⁶ Watson then seeks to diagnose his partner. "Why is the only woman you've ever cared about a world-class criminal? Are you a masochist?" (Ritchie 2009: 32:08-32:12). His use of Krafft-Ebing's notion of masochism is anachronistic but telling.⁷ As the author of *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1894) writes, "[f]or the masochist the principal thing is subjection to the woman; the punishment is only the expression of this relation" (Krafft-Ebing 1894: 99). Certainly, Holmes subjects himself to Adler. She is introduced by a closeup of her hand, in which she is cracking two walnuts. The suggestive image prepares us for her playing a dominant, seductive-yet-castrating role in her relationship with Holmes. When she first slips into his room, he is asleep on the floor, prone

and passive. As she exits, he realises that she is staying at the Grand Hotel. “Do you remember the Grand?” she asks him. “They gave me our old room” (Ritchie 2009: 30:36-30:39). After Holmes tries and fails to break into this room, Adler distracts him by changing clothes. She then offers him drugged wine, and as he falls unconscious she kisses him vigorously. When next we see him, Holmes is nude in Adler’s bed, handcuffed to the bedposts. His situation suggests a sexual encounter, but whether one actually occurred (and, if so, whether he was conscious for it) is an open question. In a later scene at a slaughterhouse, Adler is the one who is handcuffed and hanging by a hook, alongside Holmes, Watson, and the carcasses of pigs. The scenario calls to mind *Ripper Street*’s association of prostitutes with pigs and Jack the Ripper’s butchery. More unusual, and thus more striking, is that Adler wears men’s clothes: trousers, braces, and half boots. Just as significantly, she literally comes between Holmes and Watson while the three are hanging together; moreover, while attempting to rescue her, Holmes removes Watson’s belt and tells him, “Don’t get excited” (Ritchie 2009: 1:22:37).⁸ The scene echoes an earlier one in which Adler appears to be in trouble, though appearances deceive. As she walks down a back street, a shabby-looking man offers her flowers and promises to “cut [her] a deal” (Ritchie 2009: 34:13-34:15). Another approaches her from behind and says, “Hello, gorgeous. You got somethin’ for me?” (Ritchie 2009: 34:20-34:21). This scene too evokes prostitution and the Ripper, but the resourceful Adler pulls out a truncheon and clubs down one adversary before drawing a knife on the other, holding it to his throat and taking his wallet. Whether the knife is separate from the truncheon or embedded within it remains unclear, though the weapon could be a variation on the sword cane that Watson carries. Holmes, who is spying on the encounter, whispers, “That’s the Irene I know” (Ritchie 2009: 34:41-34:42). Adler also handles a hypodermic syringe and needle (used to inject the bottle of wine that she offers Holmes), together with a gun and a knife (used to attack Blackwood near the film’s conclusion). Ostensibly a love interest intended to heterosexualise and masculinise Holmes, and to buffer him from Watson, Adler is oddly androgynous for a *femme fatale*. In fact, the dominant, cross-dressing, beard-seeking, phallic-weapons-wielding woman’s greatest charm for Holmes may well be her masculinity.

To a certain extent, Irene Adler exemplifies the independent and assertive New Woman of the 1890s, whom caricatures linked with the

effeminate New Man. Rejecting this parodic pairing, New Women writers portrayed the New Man as seeking “a relationship freed from the bonds of traditional gender models” (MacDonald 2015: 3). If we view Holmes as a New Man, then he seems to complement Adler as a New Woman. The apparent equality of their relationship is problematised, however, by “Ritchie’s re-visioning of Adler” as merely “Holmes’s love interest and a sexy criminal” (Primorac 2013: 100). More complex and thought-provoking representations of New Women and Men are found in *Ripper Street*. The London County Council member Jane Cobden (Leanne Best), the medical doctor Amelia Frayn (Louise Brealey), and the journalist Rachel Castello (Anna Koval) are all New Women who, though Cobden is briefly involved with Edmund Reid, function not as romantic partners for the men but as autonomous and multidimensional characters in their own right – and as counterbalances to leading women such as Long Susan and Rose Erskine (later Rose Drake), whose relationships with leading men are at least as important as their own considerable intelligence and talent. The New Men of *Ripper Street* are less easily recognised, though Edmund Reid is drawn to strong-willed women who commit themselves to public pursuits, including Emily Reid, Jane Cobden, and Deborah Goren (Lucy Cohu); Bennet Drake supports his fiancée Rose’s desire to continue her career as a music-hall performer after they marry; and Homer Jackson sometimes sees himself and his wife, Long Susan, as equal partners in crime. Though hardly a sensitive man, Ronald Capshaw (John Heffernan), who serves briefly as Long Susan’s attorney and assistant, likewise exhibits some of the characteristics of the New Man. Capshaw’s working for an assertive woman aligns him with *Penny Dreadful*’s Renfield (Samuel Barnett), who is employed as a secretary by the alienist Dr Florence Seward (Patti LuPone), a female version of Dr John Seward from *Dracula* (1897). Like Irene Adler, Florence Seward is an American. That these two New Women travel from America to England not only shows their intrepidity, but also underscores how closely *Sherlock Holmes* and *Penny Dreadful* connect transatlantic journeys with the construction of gender roles.

This connection, which also appears in *Ripper Street* and *Crimson Peak*, is especially noteworthy with respect to the fabrication of masculinity. The Americans Homer Jackson and Ethan Chandler relocate to London in the (vain) hope of escaping their troubled pasts. Jackson, formerly Matthew Judge, betrayed his employer, Theodore Swift (Ian McElhinney), by

abducting and marrying the man's daughter Caitlin (now Long Susan). Ethan, formerly Ethan Lawrence Talbot (a nod to the Universal wolfman films),⁹ served as a soldier in the Indian Wars before killing his brutal commander, joining the Apaches, and inadvertently helping them to slaughter his own family save for his father, Jared Talbot (Brian Cox). Ironically, each man finds in London not refuge but more danger and violence: Jackson while working in Whitechapel to solve crimes with Reid, and Ethan in both the East and West Ends as a hired gun for Sir Malcolm in his battle against a variety of malign supernatural beings. Moreover, in a return of the repressed, both men are hunted in London by their fellow Americans: Jackson, by Pinkerton agents working for Theodore Swift; Ethan, by bounty hunters in the service of Jared Talbot. Jackson eludes his pursuers and remains in the East End, but Ethan is captured and returns to New Mexico to confront both his biological father and his spiritual father, the Apache Kaetenay (Wes Studi), before he comes back to London in an attempt to save his love interest, Vanessa Ives. Sir Malcolm, a second father surrogate for Ethan, follows him to America, combats mere ordinary gunmen rather than monsters, and then returns with him and Kaetenay to England. In *Crimson Peak*, McMichael treks from New York to England to rescue Edith, only to be rescued by her after being stabbed by both Sir Thomas and Lucille. (Presumably, after the film ends, he and Edith return to New York.) Sir Thomas, as we have seen, journeys to America in search of funding and a fiancée, before returning to his ancestral home, where he is ultimately killed by his sister. Rather than depicting jaded Englishmen moving into the uncivilised American frontier in order to rediscover and reinvigorate their manhood (see Windholz 2000: 636-637), these narratives portray either American men entering an England which, in its own fashion, is just as unruly and hazardous as the Wild West, or Englishmen who are safer abroad than at home.

3. Masculinity in the Private Sphere

By critiquing the masculine valorisation of exploration and conquest, both geographical and scientific, these texts demonstrate how men's success in the public sphere is undercut by failure in the private one. In *Penny Dreadful*, Sir Malcolm, who looks and acts much like Sir Richard Burton, is famous for trekking through Africa, an enormous map of which covers a wall in his home. Jared Talbot drove indigenous peoples from an area of

New Mexico in order to establish a ranch there; and, in an echo of Sir Malcolm's décor, a large map of his property hangs on a wall in his study. Victor Frankenstein has charted the territories of life and death. Even the flamboyantly effete Ferdinand Lyle (Simon Russell Beale) is an Egyptologist who has explored the secrets of the ancient world. In *Ripper Street*, Jackson's scientific surveys are of a far more modest nature than Victor's, but the skeletal chart on his bedroom wall indicates his expertise in the regions of the human body (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 55:38-55:43). Reid too is an explorer, who in 'The King Came Calling' is willing to "cross to Corporation land" and "step out of [his] jurisdiction" (Wilson, Croghan, and Warlow 2013a: 50:55, 48:46). In *Sherlock Holmes*, the detective conducts strange experiments that mirror those of his adversary, Lord Blackwood, who plots to conquer the world. In *Crimson Peak*, Sir Thomas invents a clay harvester, while his rival McMichael investigates not only ophthalmology but also spirit photography.

These familiar markers of masculinity are made unfamiliar as the price of exploration and conquest is emphasised. In *Sherlock Holmes*, Holmes's only friend is Watson, and Lord Blackwood is hanged. In *Ripper Street*, Reid's focus on his work leaves him emotionally exhausted and estranged from his wife Emily, who in 'The King Came Calling' tells him, "You dedicate your life to service, and at some sacrifice, Edmund" (Wilson, Croghan, and Warlow 2013a: 18:47-18:50). His sacrifices include Emily herself, who is confined to an asylum before committing suicide. Meanwhile, Jackson's medical acumen contributes to an accusation that he is the Ripper. *Crimson Peak* shows how Sir Thomas's fixation on developing his clay harvester drives him to kill his first three wives. *Penny Dreadful* demonstrates most forcefully and frequently the toll taken when men concentrate on frontiers and neglect their own homes. In 'This World Is Our Hell' (2016), when Jared Talbot boasts, "There are mountains named after me", Sir Malcolm responds, "And at what cost? Your home's empty. Your son hates you. Your vainglorious pursuits have led to nothing but bloodshed and heartache" (Cabezas and Hinderaker 2016: 44:11-44:27). The explorer knows whereof he speaks. His own son, Peter, hoped that his father would name a mountain after him. Instead, Peter died while in Africa with Sir Malcolm, who left him to perish from dysentery. Later, Sir Malcolm's daughter Mina and wife Gladys die violently, leaving him alone. In 'And They Were Enemies', Sir Malcolm is castigated by spectres of his

family, while Victor's abused and abandoned creations denounce him. Yet Ethan, Sir Malcolm, and even Victor find some passing solace in forming a replacement family. Sir Malcolm takes Vanessa and Ethan into his home; thus, they function as surrogates for Mina and Peter. This replacement is problematic, however, for the romance that develops between these pseudo-siblings holds incestuous undertones that are echoed in the relationships among Victor and his metaphorical children. After Victor resurrects Brona (now named Lily), both he and his Creature-son pursue her, though she serves as a daughter to the former and a sister to the latter. In *Crimson Peak*, incest is explicit rather than implied, as the fungible title of Lady Sharpe is shared by Sir Thomas's sister and wife, both of whom have sex with him and (in an Oedipal twist) exchange an engagement ring that belonged to his mother. Through incest, the Gothic narratives eroticise the self-absorption at the core of masculine exploration and conquest. In 'Night Work', Victor ingenuously boasts to Sir Malcolm, "I would never chart a river, or scale a peak to take its measure, or plant a flag. There's no point. It's solipsistic self-aggrandisement" (Bayona and Logan 2014a: 37:18-37:24). Yet, ironically, he is blind to his own phallic obsession: "There is only one worthy goal for scientific exploration: piercing the tissue that separates life from death. Everything else [...] is insignificant" (Bayona and Logan 2014a: 38:04). Victor's single-mindedness leaves both him and his creations alone; like Sir Malcolm and Jared Talbot, he has failed as a father.¹⁰

These men's public achievement and private inadequacy are shared by other male characters in *Crimson Peak*, *Ripper Street*, and *Sherlock Holmes*. While defining Victorian masculinity, John Tosh emphasises that a successful man had to set up, provide for, and control his home. "Once established, a household had to be sustained by the man's productive activities," his "unaided labours" (Tosh 2005: 36). The man was expected to be the master, for "[h]ome might be the 'woman's sphere', but the husband who abdicated from his rights [...] was in common opinion less than a man" (Tosh 2005: 36-37). Sir Thomas cannot provide for either his wife or his sister; furthermore, his inadequacies as breadwinner and lover are metaphorically connected. Seeking support and approval from older, more successful men, he claims that his phallic clay harvester "digs deep" into the yonic Sharpe mines (Del Toro 2015: 9:33). His is an empty boast, however, for he has only a malfunctioning prototype and a model constructed in the attic of his ancestral home, Allerton Hall, where the invention sits alongside

the “toys” and “trinkets” (Del Toro 2015: 54:34, 54:38) that he made for Lucille when they were children confined to the attic and beginning their lifelong incestuous liaison. These toys in the attic prefigure both the siblings’ mental instability and its foundation, their unhealthy childishness. Yet they charm Edith, who is willing to invest her father’s fortune in her husband’s dream. When she visits Sir Thomas’s workshop-toyshop, he is struck and aroused by how different she is from his sister. The two begin kissing ardently, and it seems that Sir Thomas might finally consummate his marriage and attain hegemonic masculinity – until Lucille arrives and, simultaneously playing mother, sister, and wife, pours toxic tea for Edith. Later, a downcast Sir Thomas, literally and figuratively burned by his clay harvester, confesses to Edith, “My machine will never work” (Del Toro 2015: 1:01:23). “Who did you marry? A failure”, he tells her, to which unmanly concession his wife – who has left her life in America in order to become effectively entombed in Allerton Hall, a representation of the private sphere as a house of horrors – responds with understandable terseness, “Don’t say that. You’re all that I have” (Del Toro 2015: 1:01:38). Once Edith and Sir Thomas leave Allerton Hall, he is finally able to consummate their union (if only with her on top), and after their return his machine actually begins to work. Ultimately, however, he reunites with and submits to his sister, the aptly named Lucille Sharpe, a penetrative and symbolically castrating, phallic mother surrogate who stabs him to death, and whose knives and cleaver substitute for their mother’s ubiquitous cane. That Sir Thomas falls in love with Edith and not his previous three wives might well be a function of her own maternal phallic puissance. After stabbing her brother and assaulting Edith with the cleaver used to kill their mother (thus aligning Edith with the Sharpe matriarch), Lucille is herself stabbed by Edith.

Like Sir Thomas, Christian Thwaites (Steven Robertson) is unable to provide for his wife, Maude, either sexually or financially. While questioning him in ‘I Need Light’, Reid explains, “Your wife’s body bears the signs of recent intimacy, and I need to know if that intimacy was shared with yourself” (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 30:24). “Of course it was”, Thwaites lies, before Reid confronts him with pornographic photos of Maude and asks, “How far and how openly did your wife share her intimacy?” (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 31:01-31:05). Thwaites then confesses to his inadequacy and “shame”, explaining that Maude worked as

a prostitute before he married her and “promised her comfort and dignity” (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 31:26, 32:05-32:10). Unfortunately, however, “[m]y employment was not as secure as I thought”, he admits to Reid; “I had no grounds to promise her those things. Her home, even her violin, I mortgaged it all” (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 33:04-33:20). After her husband lost his job, Maude was compelled to return to prostitution, and to begin working in pornography to maintain their middle-class, respectable lifestyle. Her labour rather than her husband’s sustained their household, and the illusion that he was the head of it. “Everything she did, she did for us”, he tells Reid, then corrects himself: “For me. So that my pride might not be ruined” (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 41:11-41:23). Thwaites is useless as a source of information on his wife’s clients and whereabouts, for he has repressed the inversion of their roles. “As far as I was concerned, it wasn’t happening at all” (Shankland and Warlow 2012: 33:11-33:18), he admits as tears run down his face.

This transposition of gender roles and responsibilities is also a key feature of the relationship between the feckless Homer Jackson and Long Susan, his business-minded wife and brothel manager. Jackson’s emasculation is highlighted in ‘Threads of Silk and Gold’, when he confronts the barber and slumlord Silas Duggan (Frank Harper), to whom Susan is in debt. Aiming his pistol at Duggan, Jackson announces, “You’ve had your last penny out of my lady. You try to squeeze one farthing more, I’m gonna see you paid in lead” (Hawkes, Martin, and Finlay 2013: 24:50-24:54). Jackson cocks and fires his gun, but Duggan strikes his hand and causes him to shoot his own reflection in the mirror. He then punches Jackson, forces him into a chair, and smashes a bottle against his head. “Here, shall I take my razor to your pizzle, make a gelding of you?” he asks while holding a razor to Jackson’s throat. “Have you [stand] by mewling, as I spatchcock your wife upon my bunk?” (Hawkes, Martin, and Finlay 2013: 25:16-25:23). Duggan runs the razor across Jackson’s throat, drawing blood. In a closeup, the camera lingers on Duggan’s crotch for a moment before moving down the front of Jackson’s body, ending with a shot of his gun on the floor. Duggan picks it up, and for a moment the gun appears in the foreground, against Jackson’s crotch in the background. Duggan empties the gun, tells Jackson, “Now leave my shop, cowboy”, and tosses the useless weapon onto Jackson’s lap (Hawkes, Martin, and Finlay 2013: 25:35-25:39). Figuratively though not literally castrated, Jackson returns to the

brothel, where Susan finds him drunk and morose. “[W]hat do I have to give you?” he asks her. “I got nothing left. I broke every promise I ever made you, I brought you down to this” (Hawkes, Martin, and Finlay 2013: 31:35-31:40). He then begins to cry. “And now I can’t even protect you. [...] I’m not a man” (Hawkes, Martin, and Finlay 2013: 31:45-31:50). She reproaches him: “Don’t make this about your wounded pride. [...] The only thing you ever look to is your next swashbuckling bloody daydream. You finish your bottle. I will not indulge your self-pity” (Hawkes, Martin, and Finlay 2013: 31:45-32:01). Later, when Susan realises that Jackson has gambled her money on a failed speculation in Argentina and ruined them, she drives him from the brothel. “Put down my whisky and get out. [...] You took our money, which I made, and you threw it away. You were right about one thing. You aren’t a man” (Hawkes, Martin, and Finlay 2013: 53:01-53:29). Jackson’s emasculation is thus completed by his wife, whose observations on his drinking and dreaming underscore his oral fixation and infantile dependence upon her.

In *Sherlock Holmes*, the detective and Watson are likewise depicted as immature. As middle-aged, professional men, each ought to inhabit his own home and head his own family. Instead, they live, work, and socialise together, watched over by Mrs Hudson – whom Holmes calls “Nanny” (Ritchie 2009: 10:32, 10:40). Watson, however, seeks to change this arrangement, and his moving away from Holmes frames the film. In the sequence after the credits, the establishing shot lingers on a Baker Street sign before heading toward the home that Holmes and Watson share. As the camera pauses at a window, in voiceover Watson informs a patient, Captain Philips, of his blood pressure. In a medium shot, as the two talk, we see the doctor at the window, standing behind three nude male figures in various poses. These might be medical models, but they also resemble classical Greek statues. That Watson looks past them and out of the window suggests his wish to leave the homosocial (and potentially queer) private sphere he shares with Holmes. He articulates this desire to Philips, noting that his new home will feature “a woman’s touch” (Ritchie 2009: 7:34), a phrase indicating both a feminine approach to interior decoration and heterosexual contact from his new wife. Watson’s conversation is interrupted by gunshots from Holmes’s room. “Your colleague [...] won’t be moving with you, will he?” the alarmed Philips asks Watson, who responds emphatically, “No, he won’t” (Ritchie 2009: 7:52-7:58). The nude male figures again appear in the

background when Watson advises Holmes against taking Irene Adler's case. "Well, I may not have a choice", Holmes responds. "After all, I may be paying the rent on my own soon, thanks to you" (Ritchie 2009: 35:50-35:54). The detective then points a violin bow at the doctor, who says, "Get that out of my face". "It's not in your face, it's in my hand", Holmes retorts. "Get what's in your hand out of my face" is Watson's rejoinder, and the last word in the first of their many playfully queer exchanges (Ritchie 2009: 35:56-36:00). When the film nears its conclusion and Watson prepares to leave Baker Street with Mary, we may assume that the ambiguous male figures – professional paraphernalia and/or mementos of his quasi-queer relationship with Holmes – go with him, thereby militating against his new, more traditional living arrangement and continuing to call his maturity and heteronormative sexuality into question.

4. (Neo-)Victorian and Contemporary Masculinities

In 1990, Elaine Showalter noted that "the last decades of the twentieth century seem to be repeating the problems, themes, and metaphors of the *fin de siècle*" (Showalter 1990: 1). Today, as Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn point out, "[l]ate-Victorian masculinity [...] is a live site for reflection on and adaptation of contemporary forms of male identity" (Heilmann and Llewellyn 2015: 99). By portraying men who exemplify and cope with the many dimensions and ever-changing nature of masculinity, *Sherlock Holmes*, *Crimson Peak*, *Ripper Street*, and *Penny Dreadful* speak to twenty-first-century viewers whose world has been changed by same-sex marriage, transgender identities, the increasing political and economic power of women, and the concomitant struggles of seemingly outmoded men. Both challenges to hegemonic masculinity and new notions of what it means to be a man abound in recent publications, including titles such as Grayson Perry's *The Descent of Man* (2016), Hannah Rosin's *The End of Men* (2012), Jack Myers's *The Future of Men* (2016), and Tim Samuels's *Who Stole My Spear?* (2016). That neo-Victorian narratives engage the perceived contemporary crisis of masculinity makes perfect sense, since our current understanding of men's roles, especially as they relate to the separate spheres of work and home, developed in the Victorian period. Moreover, neo-Victorian depictions of masculinity appeal to modern audiences because they "offer simultaneous possibilities of proximity and distance" that are intensely uncanny (Llewellyn 2008: 175). Both at home

(*heimlich*) and not at home (*unheimlich*) in the (neo-)Victorian world, today's men may cathartically experience and resolve a return of repressed anxieties about masculinity via neo-Victorian films and television programmes that portray past men's lives, identities, and relationships with sympathy and sophistication. Seemingly traditional Victorian macho men such as Sir Malcolm Murray or Detective Inspector Edmund Reid struggle with the gender roles scripted for them by society, while the 'effete' Ferdinand Lyle shows 'manly' fortitude – thereby indicating that effeminacy may signify not vitiated or absent masculinity, but masculinity in a subversive form. Characters as diverse as Dorian Gray, Ethan Chandler, Holmes and Watson, and Sir Thomas Sharpe are, to a greater or lesser extent, depicted as queer. At once familiar and unfamiliar, these men highlight the uncanniness of neo-Victorianism, a mode that occupies and addresses two very different – yet quite similar – eras. This uncanniness helps to undermine the repressive hypothesis, and enables viewers to recognise that sexual identities in the nineteenth century were as intricate and varied as they are today.

While these representations of masculinity are richly imagined and potentially progressive, when considered as adaptations in conversation with both their original sources and present-day audiences whose understanding of the nineteenth century ranges widely, they are replete with complications and shortcomings. Even as they overturn the modern notion of the Victorians as repressed, they replicate the late-Victorian period's own reaction against rigid gender norms as articulated in its Gothic fictions, and in its stories of New Men and Women. Yet they are limited by these same norms. Although women viewers may see themselves in characters who discover and assert their power, such as Irene Adler, Edith Cushing, and Long Susan, only Vanessa Ives is central to the plot of the story she inhabits (and, indeed, to *Penny Dreadful*'s entire narrative arc). Nevertheless, even Vanessa cannot save herself from a sacrificial death. Likewise, while Brona/Lily – whose revivification by Victor rather surprisingly results in her dominating rather than submitting to him – survives, her incipient feminist revolution does not. In these texts, the fate of women, together with the predominance of male actors and male-focussed storylines, recreates and reinforces the gender-based imbalance of both Victorian and contemporary society and culture. Furthermore, in seeking to correct the fallacy of Victorian prudishness by (over)emphasising sex, these adaptations may

execute “an ethical as well as an aesthetic turn that sabotages the feminist potential of the texts they adapt” (Primorac 2013: 93). More broadly, their uncanniness can lead to a “blurring effect” that makes it difficult to distinguish the Victorian from the neo-Victorian (Whelehan 2012: 274), thus reducing their potential for elucidating both the Victorian period and our own. Finally, by incorporating a modern perspective into their depictions of Victorian masculinity (and femininity), these narratives engage in a neo-Victorian “presentism” which, though “a purposeful [...] critical and creative practice,” might well convey “distinctly mixed messages” (Kohlke 2018: 5, 6). These considerations are without doubt significant. Also certain – and tremendously exciting – is that a great deal of work remains to be done on how, why, and which onscreen neo-Victorian representations of masculinity effectively address both past and present constructions of (and worries about) sexuality and gender.

Notes

1. R. W. Connell defines the term as the “gender practice [. . .] which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women” (Connell 2005: 77).
2. In *Sherlock Holmes*, the detective exposes Lord Blackwood’s magic as trickery. In ‘The King Came Calling’, Reid tells Ressler, “You and I, we are not magicians” (Wilson, Croghan, and Warlow 2013a: 57:59-58:00). In ‘Ashes and Diamonds’ (2014), a fake clairvoyant victimises those who have lost loved ones in a train accident.
3. *Penny Dreadful* is set apart from the other texts under consideration not only by its Gothicism, but also by its representing “a shift in modern adaptation” that “disrupts linearity and undermines notions of the authority and priority of an originating text” (Lee and King 2015: 2).
4. See Boehm-Schnitker 2015 for an analysis of the film’s Girardian triangulation.
5. It is also significant that McMichael and Doyle (and Holmes) are expert in helping people to see clearly, and that the literally and figuratively myopic Edith sometimes wears glasses, the better to read and write Gothic fictions – i.e., to inhabit and create fantasies.
6. By using the word *beard*, Watson might anachronistically suggest that Holmes enables Adler to appear heterosexual, and vice versa. According to

Lillian Faderman, ““having a beard”” is a term from the twentieth century that describes “a relationship between a lesbian and a gay man, which had as a primary purpose enabling the two to pass as a heterosexual couple” (Faderman 2008: 78).

7. *Masochist* was coined by Krafft-Ebing in 1892, two years after the events of *Sherlock Holmes*.
8. See Boehm-Schnitker 2015 for an interpretation of this scene that investigates its (repressed) queerness.
9. *The Wolf Man* (1941), produced and directed for Universal Pictures by George Waggner, features Lon Chaney Jr. as Lawrence Talbot, the eponymous monster. The actor reprised this role in *Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man* (1943), directed by Roy William Neill; *House of Frankenstein* (1944) and *House of Dracula* (1945), both directed by Erle C. Kenton; and *Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein* (1948), directed by Charles Barton.
10. Lauren Rocha claims that the men’s shortcomings and inner conflicts fragment their identities, thereby problematising their masculinity and limiting their agency (Rocha 2016: 33-34).

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