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## Framed

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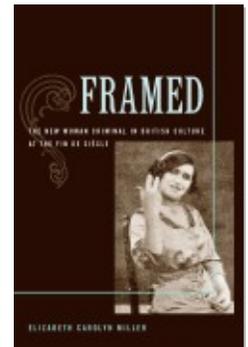
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## PRIVATE AND PUBLIC EYES

*Sherlock Holmes and the Invisible Woman*

Consider figure 7, an illustration from Arthur Conan Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia," the first installment in what would become a long-running, endlessly influential series of short detective stories featuring Sherlock Holmes. Outside the context of the narrative, the image seems to represent an exchange of glances between a young man passing through a nighttime street and two gentlemen on the threshold of a residence. The interplay of their gazes is complex: the walker meets one of the gentlemen's eyes, while the second gentleman looks at his companion and digs in his pocket for a key. The picture provides a full, frontal view of the itinerant young man, but an indirect view of the men on the stoop. If the image existed apart from the story, one might interpret the scene as dangerous, shady, or queer: the young man's hat is pulled low over his eyes and his posture is hunched over, while the men on the stoop appear startled and anxious to enter the house. Perhaps the walker is considering robbing the older men, or perhaps his glance is one of sexual invitation. Perhaps the gentlemen fear him as a threat, or perhaps they are disarmed at finding themselves cruised.

In the context of the story, however, the image calls for a very different set of interpretations: we learn that the young man in the picture is actually Irene Adler, Holmes's female adversary. She has cross-dressed and trailed Holmes and Watson, circumventing the trap Holmes has laid so that he will fail to close the case. Holmes's inability to find his key in

this image thus reveals his larger failure as a detective: in the moment depicted here, he neglects to identify the cross-dressed Irene Adler, remarking to Watson, “Now, I wonder who the deuce that could have been” (26). As readers and viewers, we might sympathize with Holmes’s failure; there seems to be no “clue” in the picture to indicate that Adler is not a man. W. J. T. Mitchell has used the Wittgensteinian concept of the “duck-rabbit picture” to describe “dialectical” or “multistable” images that seem to perfectly accommodate two or more mutually exclusive interpretations (45). Following this notion, we might “read” the picture as an allegory of imagistic ambiguity. It suggests the difficulty of interpreting the world through visual apprehension, or the fundamental inconsistency between imagistic and linguistic modes of representation, or the inevitable change of meaning that occurs when the visual is mediated through language. Without the words of the story, one would never know the walker is a woman. Without the picture, one would never grasp the disarming menace of Irene Adler’s transsexual performance. Indeed, as an image and as a literary figure, Adler’s identity is radically double. In the “linguistic” version of this scene, she passes by before Holmes can figure out who she is: she is Baudelaire’s *passante*, the desirable but fleeting woman of the modern city who disappears before one can grasp her. Meanwhile, in the “imagistic” version of the scene, she is a criminal or cruising young man whom the other men appear to flee. Like the duck-rabbit, she is predator or prey, depending on how you look at her.

The imagistic and linguistic duality of Irene Adler previews what I will identify as a broader problem with detection and the criminal female body in the Sherlock Holmes stories. Holmes, the expert eye, finds his visual acumen continually thwarted by the female body’s resistance to interpretation. Critical work on the series has focused on the stories’ innovative faith in the power of vision and detection, their empiricism, their panopticism, their modern certainty about identity’s location in the body, and their revolutionary merging of the science of crime and the science of physiology.<sup>1</sup> By focusing on Conan Doyle’s female criminals, however, this chapter uncovers a crisis of image and sex that undercuts Holmes’s system of visual detection. In the course of the stories, the body is extolled as the location of a new, “scientific” form of identity, as Ronald Thomas has recently argued; Holmes, however, finds that female identity is easily detached from visually comprehensible bodily moorings.<sup>2</sup> Published in heavily illustrated periodical formats, the detective series was generically and formally suited to make this

point; thus I begin my argument by discussing the visual culture of the detective series, especially in terms of late-Victorian criminology, racial anthropology, and theories of visual epistemology. The series's treatment of race and criminality usefully reveals how Holmes prioritizes visually mediated knowledge. Such knowledge continually fails in his interactions with female criminals, however—a disparity that emerges, I argue, from a fundamental opposition: the revelatory mandates of law, policing, and legal interventionism conflict with the stories' impulse to veil the private, feminized sphere. Thus the first half of the chapter shows the female criminal as a representational problem in the series, while the second half shows the political and social ramifications of this figural crisis.

#### THE PICTORIAL PAST OF DETECTIVE SERIES

Victorian narrative often seems to parallel or even predict developments in visual technology, as recent critics have explored with regard to photography and realism.<sup>3</sup> My chapter takes up this line of inquiry in another cultural field: the visual composition of gender and criminality in Conan Doyle's detective series, 1891–1904.<sup>4</sup> In the years surrounding the emergence of cinema in 1896, detective series expressed with particular force a burgeoning shift toward a visually oriented culture of knowledge, and their magazine format was part of this expression. In 1891, Conan Doyle began publishing short detective stories about Sherlock Holmes in the *Strand Magazine*, a new and innovative periodical that established a distinctly visual narrative medium. Conan Doyle had already published two novels about Holmes, but the franchise only took off when packaged as a short fiction series in a thickly illustrated monthly magazine.<sup>5</sup> The stories and the *Strand* were immediately and enormously popular, and a host of publications with similar content and format soon cropped up. In Britain, detective series thus emerged simultaneously with the mass-market illustrated monthly magazine, and the impact of the two cultural forms is virtually inseparable.

The visual narrative form of Conan Doyle's stories was a crucial factor in the way contemporary readers perceived them. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin claims that vision is historically constructed, that "human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence" and that the "manner in which human sense perception is organized, the medium in which

it is accomplished, is determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well” (222). With a “historicized” notion of sight, Conan Doyle’s treatment of imagistic codes of gender, criminality, and femininity appears interwoven with concurrent developments in visual technology. Beginning in the 1890s, image-rich periodicals like the *Strand* made a tremendous cultural impact. According to Graham Law, the 1890s saw “an entirely new generation of illustrated monthly miscellanies, the first and most successful of which was George Newnes’s *Strand Magazine* (1891–1950)” (32).<sup>6</sup> The circulation of the *Strand* was huge—around 350,000 copies a month—and its format was widely imitated (Weedon 173). This new brand of periodical was made possible by rapid shifts in publishing, which was becoming a modern, mass-market industry. Universal education and higher literacy rates had expanded the market of readers, just as the development of more efficient means of production and distribution lowered the costs of reading materials. The combined effect of these shifts was the explosion of inexpensive mass-market periodicals.<sup>7</sup>

Advances in printing technique had simultaneously made the reproduction of illustrations and photographs a cheaper and easier process, and as Andrew King and John Plunkett note, prominent illustration was a distinctive feature of the “New Journalism” of the 1890s and its characteristic “human interest” style (377). Illustrated periodicals had existed since the advent of lithography in the early nineteenth century, and photographs had been included in magazines and newspapers from mid-century, but the illustrated monthlies of the 1890s relied upon an intensely visual narrative format. Throughout the Victorian era, crime stories were more thoroughly “pictorialized” than other genres; George Cruikshank’s famous illustrations for W. Harrison Ainsworth’s *Jack Sheppard* (1839) and Charles Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1838) helped establish a pictorial legacy within crime fiction, as Martin Meisel has explored. For most of the century, however, illustrated magazine fiction featured very few images for many pages of text; in contrast, George Newnes, the originator of the *Strand*, envisioned a magazine with “a picture on every page” (Pound 30).<sup>8</sup> The 1880s saw a “photomechanical revolution” in printing, according to Geoffrey Wakeman, which made a more imagistic narrative landscape possible.<sup>9</sup> Early editions of Newnes’s *Strand* include a drawing, photograph, illustration, or cartoon on nearly every page, and many pages have multiple images. Recurring features like the “Portraits of Celebrities” series consist almost entirely of pictures, reminding us how modern forms of celebrity depend on image-rich me-

dia. Mass-market illustrated monthlies like the *Strand* thus put a great deal of weight on illustration and stimulate multiple intersections or tensions between picture and text, such as I describe at the beginning of this chapter.

The inexpensive, image-rich format of the *Strand* was instantly appealing to the British reading public. Critics have linked the publication's popularity to many different factors. Some have argued that Sherlock Holmes was responsible for its spiraling circulation; Conan Doyle's protagonist captured the imagination of his public to an unprecedented degree, and the *Strand's* sales peaked when a Holmes story ran.<sup>10</sup> It is impossible to isolate how much Holmes's new context was responsible for this appeal, however; the earlier Holmes novels had not sold as well. Critics such as Ed Wiltse have argued that Conan Doyle's unique brand of serialization incited public demand for periodicals publishing such stories, and mass-market illustrated magazines of the 1890s, following Conan Doyle's success, changed their formats to emphasize narrative series over serial narratives (Law 33). Audiences found the uniquely autonomous continuity provided by this format addictive: like television sitcoms today, the series allowed readers to move effortlessly in and out of readership without the commitment necessary for reading an entire serialized novel. It didn't matter if one missed an episode or even a few. Once a reader grasped the underlying formula and the central characters, the stories could be read in almost any order.

Holmes's deepest cultural impact, however, was in many ways a specifically visual one. Conan Doyle provided his audience with an unusually visible fictional world. Many critics have discussed the "iconic" status of Holmes, the crystallization of his image in early theatrical and filmic productions, the accumulated visual detail in Conan Doyle's brand of realism, the stories' emphasis on observation and surveillance, Holmes's particularly visual mode of detection, and the author's own special interest in visual perception. Trained as a physician, Conan Doyle had received advanced preparation in ophthalmology, and as an eye specialist he was highly attuned to the human capacity for visual perception and misperception. It is hardly surprising, then, that the stories challenge the foundations of vision and knowledge amid a newly imagistic and consumerist cultural terrain; nor is it surprising that the stories exhibit, as I argue, a profound ambivalence about the image-centric culture that they seemingly showcase.

Indeed, while many critics have argued that the Victorians inveterately privileged the visual, Kate Flint has identified a counterdiscourse

that challenged “the sufficiency of the visible,” arguing that the visual was “of paramount importance to the Victorians,” yet also “a heavily problematised category” (25). Focusing on the late-Victorian period, Jonathan Crary has argued that the 1880s and 1890s saw a “generalized crisis in perception” amid “new technological forms of spectacle, display, [and] projection” (*Suspensions* 2). The quick succession of visual innovations toward the end of the century—including cinema, x-rays, and other new technologies—demanded new kinds of attention and sight.<sup>11</sup> Such perceptive instability created a kind of “visual vertigo” in writers like Conan Doyle: he is powerfully attracted to the idea of visual semiotics, and palpably optimistic about the brave new world of visual technology, but often contradictory about how images make meaning. Fecund with images and marked by an accelerating rate of change in audiences’ visual acumen, this era saw the rise of the image-saturated consumerist environment that we still live in today. It is no wonder that the visual innovations of the period could be confusedly deployed: not only did they transform audience’s ways of seeing and knowing the world, but they dismantled cherished definitional categories such as “art” and “authenticity.” Benjamin’s now-familiar discussion of how the ideology of artistic “aura” was flattened by the proliferation of mechanical reproducibility suggests how visual innovations have called into question Western epistemological categories that had seemed both ageless and historically impermeable (“Work of Art”). Excavating the perceptive and cultural shifts that occurred in the context of such visual developments has long interested historians of cinema, but magazine crime series of this period likewise demanded new kinds of visual attentiveness and understanding from readers.

The Holmes stories participate in such large-scale shifts by emphasizing how identity categories such as “criminality” and “femininity” function—or don’t function—as imagistic systems of signs. On the surface, the stories privilege and celebrate the eye and the image to an unprecedented degree, but on another level, they manifest deep doubt about this theory of visibility. The stories’ underlying ambivalence regarding visual epistemologies and imagistic meaning clusters around a series of problems related to the female criminal. In their depiction of women, the stories acknowledge that changing visual sensibilities are entangled with shifts in ideologies of gender, privacy, and publicity. To insist on the primacy of the visual in the making of meaning challenges the imperative to “veil” the private patriarchal family or private feminized space. In order to render these social spheres meaningful, in the logic of the stories,

they must be visually and publicly accessible. Thus Holmes's theory that crime and criminality are visually ascertainable categories, when subject to an expert gaze, comes into conflict with ideologies of domestic in-tactness and feminine concealment. This collision of values is most ap-parent in stories about female criminals; that such narratives are at odds with the visible criminological semiotics at work in most of the series re-veals the influential resonance of contemporary debates about criminal-ity, interventionism, and feminist challenges to patriarchal social organi-zation.

#### RACE, VISUAL EPISTEMOLOGY, AND THE CRIMINOLOGICAL GAZE

**W**e will see how women in the Holmes series disrupt the imagistic codes of meaning that govern Conan Doyle's treatment of criminality, but let me first establish how the stories construct criminality as a set of specifically visual codes, and hence assert the primacy of visually mediated knowledge. Conan Doyle's model of visible criminality was borrowed from contemporary criminal science, which emerged as a discipline in late-nineteenth-century Europe. Early criminologists operated from the premise that European criminals were throwbacks to an earlier, more "primitive" form of humanity. Like the term *homosexual*, which also emerged in this period, *criminal* came to signify a new form of identity. Criminal experts claimed this identity could be recognized via trained observation: criminals supposedly had an atavistic physiology, a distinct physical "type," and the visual traits of inborn pathology. Early criminology echoed the logic and assumptions of physiognomy and phrenology, which came to prominence in the 1820s–1840s, but was a more empirical, visual discipline. Criminologists viewed these earlier practices as inadequately "scientific" in concept and method.

In theory as well as practice, early criminology was a correlate of late-nineteenth-century visual innovation. These decades saw visual technology exploding in manifold directions, auguring limitless new possibilities for image and sight. In the field of criminology, the disciplinary uses of vision were enthusiastically investigated, and criminologists mined visual technology to find ever-more effective means of identifying criminals. Francis Galton experimented with composite photography, amalgamating shots of various felons to generate a supposedly universal criminal image, and he developed "fingerprinting," the very name of which re-

veals its debt to imagistic reproducibility. Alphonse Bertillon invented what came to be called “the mug shot,” and promoted anthropometric measurement to classify criminals’ faces. Most prominent of all the early criminologists, Cesare Lombroso assembled galleries of criminal photographs in an effort to prove the existence of a racialized criminal type. Without resorting to technological determinism, we can see that such ideas could not have been elaborated or spread in the same way fifty years earlier: they emerged as the circulation of images in texts became a cheaper and easier process.<sup>12</sup>

Following the 1890 release of Havelock Ellis’s *The Criminal*, which was essentially an English version of Lombroso’s *Criminal Man*, such ideas were not obscure in Britain but circulated widely in texts read by the general public. Ellis’s study went through four popular British editions, proffering the latest in criminological vision to a lay British audience (Radzinowicz and Hood 12). Nonfiction articles about the new science of criminology were also familiar magazine content. A piece in the *Strand* by Alger Anderson, “Detectives at School: Bertillon’s New Method of Descriptive Portraits,” summarized Bertillon’s theories and included multiple photographs of criminals and of detectives learning to identify them; another *Strand* article by FitzRoy Gardner, “Some Side-lights on Crime,” put forth a hereditary theory of criminality; an 1894 series called “Crime and Criminals” offered *Strand* readers a heavily illustrated guide to detectives’ investigative methods. Published in the same volumes as the Holmes stories, such features taught readers how to perceive Conan Doyle’s fictional criminals.

Conan Doyle employs contemporary conceptions of crime and image in the Holmes stories, and the relentlessly visual logic of Holmes’s procedures echoes timely scientific principles and practices. Of particular relevance here is the insistence on Holmes’s professional objectivity, paralleling contemporary efforts to define science in these terms. Karl Pearson, a prominent eugenicist, wrote in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1894: “Men of science are accustomed to do their own work in their own way without paying much attention to the movement of political or social thought outside the limits of their own little corner of the field of knowledge” (“Politics and Science” 140). Taking such a compartmentalization of knowledge for granted was part of the burgeoning professionalism of late-Victorian science, which Holmes epitomizes. Upon first making his acquaintance, Dr. Watson, the series’ narrator, is fascinated as much by Holmes’s obliviousness as by his expertise: “His ignorance was as remarkable as his knowledge. Of contemporary literature,

philosophy and politics he appeared to know next to nothing” (*Scarlet* 11). Quite obviously, this characterization of “the scientist” supports an ideology of professional objectivity by depicting scientific practice as detached from political or social motivation. Significantly, Holmes’s objectivity was meant to be not only logical, but visual. In the first paragraph of the first Holmes story in the *Strand*, Conan Doyle calls Holmes a “perfect . . . observing machine,” and a “sensitive instrument” with “high-power lenses” (“Scandal” 5). This depiction of Holmes as a microscope or telescope is furthered in other parts of the series: in “The Crooked Man,” he is said to resemble “a machine rather than a man” (157), and in “The Greek Interpreter” he is described as “inhuman” (193). As Watson tells Holmes in *A Study in Scarlet*: “you have brought detection as near an exact science as it ever will be brought in this world” (29).

Holmes’s objective gaze enables his authority, and throughout the series, Watson and other characters continue to be amazed by his feats of sight. At some point in each story, Holmes puts a person or thing “under the microscope” and explains how visual phenomena reveal far more of “the truth” than most people recognize. In “The ‘Gloria Scott,’” for example, merely by looking at Mr. Trevor, Holmes divines that he has feared “a personal attack” in the last year, knows how to box, has done a lot of digging, has been in New Zealand and Japan, and so on (94–95). Trevor responds: “What an eye you have!” (96). Holmes becomes less a microscope than an infrared device in “Charles Augustus Milverton”: according to Watson, “Holmes had remarkable powers, carefully cultivated, of seeing in the dark” (166–67). In “The Golden Pince-Nez,” not only darkness but history itself succumbs to Holmes’s penetrating gaze. As the story begins, he is “engaged with a powerful lens deciphering the remains of the original inscription upon a palimpsest” (218).<sup>13</sup>

Although the stories celebrate Holmes’s purportedly objective visual stance, his visual practice relies on assumptions grounded in late-Victorian criminology and anthropology, and his debt to pernicious racial theories is now only too apparent.<sup>14</sup> Flint has argued that Victorian critics tended to “see” in visual art what they already “knew,” revealing how the visual is mediated through “hidden forces of ideology” (166), and the same could be said for Holmes’s tendency to see what he believes to be true about race. A key principle of early criminology, for example, was the nineteenth-century anthropological tenet that “ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny”—that the evolution and development of a species follows the same trajectory as the development of an individual organism

within that species. By extension, this idea became foundational to theories of atavism and racial degeneration in scientific conceptions of criminality. Utilizing the metaphor of the human life-span—childhood, adulthood, and decline—to describe the evolution attained by various cultures and races, criminologists concluded that criminals who do not adhere to the behavioral norms of their society must be atavistic throwbacks to an earlier evolutionary stage. As Ellis wrote in *The Criminal*, “our own criminals frequently resemble in physical and psychical characters the normal individuals of a lower race. This is that ‘atavism’ which has been so frequently observed in criminals and so much discussed” (206–7). For his part, Holmes not only believes that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, he advocates the theory as his own invention: “I have a theory that the individual represents in his development the whole procession of his ancestors” (“Empty House” 23).

Revealing his consistency with the foundational principles of criminology, Holmes peppers his conversation with references to contemporary theorists and corroborates their faith in the power of the gaze to reveal social aberration. In “The Naval Treaty,” for example, Watson depicts Holmes as a devotee of Bertillon: “His conversation, I remember, was about the Bertillon system of measurements, and he expressed his enthusiastic admiration of the French savant” (235). As Ronald Thomas has discussed, Bertillon was most famous for developing a system to organize photographs of criminals and measurements of criminals’ bodies as a means of easing police identification. Holmes’s reliance on the accumulation of visual data bears a salient resemblance to Bertillon, and Holmes likewise depends on myths about the human body and visual difference perpetuated by criminologists like Lombroso and Ellis.

The debt that Holmes owes to anthropological theories of racialized criminality is apparent throughout the series. Metaphorical descriptions of “the dark jungle of criminal London” (“Empty House” 13) set up an elaborate parallel between criminals and “savages” and between the role of the detective and that of the anthropologist, as Joseph McLaughlin has explored in the Holmes novels. Holmes’s visual capacity as an observer, cataloger, and classifier of human and criminal “types” echoes the imperialist, “master-of-all-I-survey” gaze that Mary Louise Pratt describes in *Imperial Eyes*. In “The Six Napoleons,” for example, Holmes describes a photograph of Beppo—an Italian workman who turns out to be the story’s felon—in terms that associate its subject with the criminal type: “It represented an alert, sharp-featured simian man with thick eyebrows, and a very peculiar projection of the lower part of the face like the muz-

zle of a baboon” (182). Beppo’s photograph evokes the galleries of criminal photographs in Lombroso’s and Ellis’s criminological tomes—a link supported by the story’s visual depiction of Beppo’s capture (see figure 8)—and references to Beppo’s “simian” characteristics reveal criminal typology’s debt to theories of racial degeneration.<sup>15</sup> We learn later in the story that Beppo lives in an area of London “where the tenement houses swelter and reek with the outcasts of Europe” (186).<sup>16</sup> In Conan Doyle’s depiction, the “Italian colony” (193) evokes a bacterial colony, a festering breeding-ground for criminals, but Holmes’s initial “diagnosis” of Beppo is through a photograph, which displays only his visual features and not his social context. Holmes gleans that the photograph “was evidently taken by a snap-shot from a small camera” (182), but otherwise it presents no information beyond Beppo’s visual appearance. Here, photographic evidence—in the new form of the “snap-shot”—renders the world of the visual in isolation from context. Beppo’s “primitive” body becomes the determining aspect of his identity, the apparent cause of his “criminal” instincts. This accords with what critics such as Stephen Arata and Simon Joyce have seen as a general tendency within crime fiction to cite individual rather than social or systematic explanations for criminal deviance.<sup>17</sup>

Conan Doyle’s stories often depict male criminals as perfect specimens of the criminal type, as with Colonel Sebastian Moran in “The Empty House:” “one could not look upon his cruel blue eyes, with their drooping, cynical lids, or upon the fierce, aggressive nose and the threatening, deep-lined brow, without reading Nature’s plainest danger-signals” (19). Describing Moran’s features as “Nature’s plainest danger-signals,” Conan Doyle suggests not only that the expert eye can discern traces of pathology in criminal faces, but that such visible signals have evolved in nature as a means of imagistic semiotics.<sup>18</sup> Visible phenomena thus constitute a more “natural,” less mediated means of signification than language or speech. The imagistic language of criminality is also apparent with Professor Moriarty in “The Final Problem.” Moriarty appears not only underdeveloped but positively primordial: “his forehead domes out in a white curve, and his two eyes are deeply sunken in his head. . . . his face protrudes forward, and is for ever slowly oscillating from side to side in a curiously reptilian fashion” (254). The side-to-side turning of Moriarty’s head silently echoes the aesthetic of the mug shot, and illustrations accompanying the story allow readers to see Moriarty’s criminal visage for themselves (see figure 9). Holmes explicitly links Moriarty’s criminal physiology with an innate condition:



“WITH THE BOUND OF A TIGER HOLMES WAS ON HIS BACK.”

Fig. 8. From “The Six Napoleons”



"PROFESSOR MORIARTY STOOD BEFORE ME."

Fig. 9. From "The Final Problem"

“the man had hereditary tendencies of the most diabolical kind. A criminal strain ran in his blood” (252). Moriarty’s “bad blood” visually manifests in an antediluvian, “reptilian” appearance. Near the end of the story, Holmes tells Watson that in hunting down Moriarty, he is confronting a problem “furnished by Nature rather than those more superficial ones for which our artificial state of society is responsible” (263).<sup>19</sup> As with Beppo, this corroborates the idea that criminality is an inborn rather than situational characteristic, and that criminal features are a “natural” rather than constructed visual code.

Some of the Holmes stories suggest, with particular ferocity, how such theories of visual, racial, and bodily signification offered ideological justification for cruelty toward masses of individual human bodies. The description of an Andaman Islander named Tonga in *The Sign of Four*, for example, reminds us that such ideas contributed to genocidal atrocities such as the European colonization of Africa and the Holocaust:<sup>20</sup>

a dark mass, which looked like a Newfoundland dog . . . straightened itself into a little black man . . . with a great, misshapen head and a shock of tangled, dishevelled hair. Holmes had already drawn his revolver, and I whipped out mine at the sight of this savage, distorted creature. . . . that face was enough to give a man a sleepless night. Never have I seen features so deeply marked with all bestiality and cruelty. His small eyes glowed and burned with a sombre light, and his thick lips were writhed back from his teeth, which grinned and chattered at us with half animal fury. (85–86)

Conan Doyle’s reliance on scientific notions of primitivism is quite apparent here, but the passage depends on a particularly *visual* form of racist apprehension. Tonga begins “looking like” mere “mass,” then a dog, and finally “a little black man”: his climb up the great chain of being—in Watson’s assessment—is imagistic. Watson describes Tonga’s head as “misshapen,” his hair as “dishevelled,” and his body as “distorted”: the sequence of negative-prefixed words indicates that he apprehends Tonga’s figure in relation to a normative visual code. Watson remarks that he draws his revolver, like Holmes, “at the sight of” Tonga. Tonga’s appearance—not behavior—elicits their repulsion. Watson describes this archetypal confrontation with the Other in almost exclusively visual terms, although “race” was not an exclusively visual category in nineteenth-century conceptions. The Holmes series, as a whole, makes a

case for the immediacy and authority of visual epistemology in terms of race and criminality.

#### THE FEMALE BODY AND THE FAILURE OF IMAGISTIC SEMIOTICS

If the stories imagine race as a straightforwardly visible ontological category, gender proves to be far more protean. Indeed, while establishing the immediacy and authority of visual epistemology in terms of race and criminality, Conan Doyle's stories are uncertain when it comes to visualizing gender, sexuality, and femininity, and women often represent barricades to Holmes's visual methodology. In "The Greek Interpreter," as in other stories, Watson says that Holmes has an "aversion to women" (193), but in most of his interactions with them, he appears merely inattentive. In *The Sign of Four*, for example, upon meeting Mary Morstan, Watson exclaims, "What a very attractive woman!" Turning to Holmes, Watson is met with indifference: "He had lit his pipe again and was leaning back with drooping eyelids. 'Is she?' he said languidly; 'I did not observe'" (17). That Holmes, an expert in seeing, did not "observe" Morstan seems remarkable, but Holmes's visual capacities are often not as effective with women as with men.<sup>21</sup> Throughout the series, Holmes complains to Watson that women's inner lives are impossible to determine by their outward appearance: "the motives of women are so inscrutable. . . . Their most trivial action may mean volumes, or their most extraordinary conduct may depend upon a hair-pin or a curling-tongs" ("The Second Stain" 912). References to a "hair-pin" and "curling-tongs" indicate that part of women's inscrutability for Holmes has to do with their employment of imagistic transformation via beautification ritual.

Women are not only more difficult for Holmes to read, but they often block his detection in active and passive, conscious and unconscious ways. Especially in stories that feature a wife or fiancée of a murdered man, women tend to hurt rather than help Holmes's investigations, regardless of innocence or guilt. In "The Crooked Man" and "The Dancing Men," the wives of murdered men have nervous breakdowns and remain silent and inaccessible to Holmes throughout the stories. Although the two women are the only witnesses to the murders, and are also suspects, neither can shed any light on the investigation. In "The Crooked Man," Mrs. Barclay is struck "insensible" (160) by her husband's death, and remains

closed to Holmes's criminological gaze throughout the course of the story: "No information could be got from the lady herself, who was temporarily insane from an acute attack of brain fever" (162). Holmes must solve the case without "reading" the text that she represents. Similarly, in "The Dancing Men," Mrs. Hilton Cubitt is the main witness and suspect in her husband's murder, but a bullet has "passed through the front of her brain," and she remains unconscious for the rest of the story (85). In both cases, the women's bodies provide no useful information for Holmes: their enigmatic physicality hinders his investigations.

Sometimes, women's bodily inscrutability is intentional rather than unconscious. In "The Abbey Grange," a wife again proves useless as a witness or source of information concerning her husband's murder, but in this case she is lying rather than cataleptic. Despite Lady Brackenstall's beautiful appearance, Holmes is wary of her from the beginning: "The lady's charming personality must not be permitted to warp our judgement" (277), he tells Watson. Her lovely physical appearance and aristocratic manner hide unsavory secrets: she has been physically abused by her husband, who was consequently killed by the man she loves. When Holmes tries to question her, Lady Brackenstall's beautiful face sets "like a mask" (282), failing to reveal any information. Both she and her maid "deliberately" lie to Holmes, and he determines "we must construct our case . . . without any help from them" (279).

That the women prove indecipherable in this story is especially remarkable since Lady Brackenstall's body bears the physical evidence of her husband's abuse.<sup>22</sup> At the onset of the story, Sir Eustace Brackenstall is dead, but his wife retains the marks of his violence: she has a black eye from when he "welted her across the face with [a] stick" (288), and her arms are spotted with stabs from hatpins. She covers such signs of abuse, claiming in one instance that the "hideous, plum-coloured swelling" over her eye was given to her by a burglar (268, 270). Holmes does eventually solve the case, but not through the evidence on Lady Brackenstall's body. Instead, the murder is solved through the frank and honest admission of Captain Crocker, who killed Eustace Brackenstall under circumstances that, in Holmes's opinion, justify his act. The openness and candor of Crocker, whom Watson considers "as fine a specimen of manhood as ever passed through" Holmes's door (285), contrast sharply with the masked, inexpressive body of Lady Brackenstall.

Similarly, in "The Musgrave Ritual," a woman whose former fiancé has been killed presents an inscrutable obstacle to Holmes's investigation. In contrast to the other three stories, where the female suspects are even-

tually cleared, this woman does prove to be responsible for the man's death. Although Holmes deduces Rachel Howells's guilt, however, he is never able to establish crucial details about the crime, her motive, nor even her present whereabouts. Holmes cannot determine whether Howells actively murdered Brunton, the victim, or passively allowed his death to occur: "Was it a chance that the wood had slipped and that the stone had shut Brunton into what had become his sepulchre? Had she only been guilty of silence as to his fate? Or had some sudden blow from her hand dashed the support away . . . ?" (131). At the end of the story, these questions remain unanswered. Holmes finds some explanation for the crime in Howells's "Celtic" heritage (131), believing her Welsh ancestry makes her prone to impulsive violence.<sup>23</sup> He cannot, however, apprehend her racialized body, as the final lines of the story emphasize: "Of the woman nothing was ever heard, and the probability is that she got away out of England, and carried herself, and the memory of her crime, to some land beyond the seas" (133). Howells disappears without a trace; her secrets remain a mystery. Holmes raises the possibility that Howells was pregnant with Brunton's child when she murdered him, making her womanly body an explicit source of mystery in the story: "What smouldering fire of vengeance had suddenly sprung into flame in this passionate Celtic woman's soul when she saw the man who had wronged her—wronged her, perhaps, far more than we suspected . . . ?" (131). The final line of the passage suggests that Howells was pregnant when her fiancé abandoned her, and references to her recent illness support this idea (122), but the story leaves the question of her motive open. Conan Doyle's female characters continually represent enigmatic texts; their uncooperative bodies counteract and challenge the idea that visual vestiges of crime and criminality are immediate, patent, and obvious.

Immediate, unmediated knowledge that derives from careful visual apprehension seemingly abounds at the beginning of the series' first story, "A Scandal in Bohemia," but in the course of the narrative, Irene Adler interrupts and challenges Holmes's visual methodology. Many critics have discussed how Adler defeats the great detective; Frances Gray, for example, claims she "offers an endless destabilization and disruption of what seems fixed" (13). I want to focus specifically on Adler's employment of feminized visual spectacle to elude Holmes's eye. At the beginning of the story, Holmes's visual authority is established not only in that he is compared to a microscope, but through his expert apprehension of other people. Though his client chooses to hide his identity behind a mask and use a false name, Holmes sees through his disguise.

After Holmes calls him “your Majesty,” the King of Bohemia “with a gesture of desperation . . . [tears] the mask from his face” (12). Images of the king both masked and unmasked appear alongside the text in the *Strand* (figures 10 and 11), establishing Holmes’s flair for unmasking.

The central predicament of the case also emphasizes the primacy of visual knowledge: the king’s former lover, Adler, possesses a photograph of the two together, and he fears she will blackmail him on the eve of his impending marriage. Holmes treats photography in this case as a fetishized or idealized form of reality and an utterly transparent window into history. His conversation with the king presumes the superiority of imagistic signification over writing: “If this young person should produce her letters for blackmailing or other purposes, how is she to prove their authenticity?” The king responds,

“There is the writing.”

“Pooh, pooh! Forgery.”

“My private note-paper.”

“Stolen.”

“My own seal.”

“Imitated.”

“My photograph.”

“Bought.”

“We were both in the photograph.”

“Oh, dear! That is very bad! Your Majesty has indeed committed an indiscretion.” (13)

If the past was once a forgeable document, this passage suggests that in the age of photography, it is an inexorable force.

André Bazin, an early theorist of film, argued in his influential 1945 essay “The Ontology of the Photographic Image” that photographs make the object they depict *more real*. He claimed that “The photographic image is the object itself, the object freed from the conditions of space and time that govern it” (14), and that “Only the impassive lens . . . is able to present [its object] in all its virginal purity to my attention and consequently to my love” (15). Holmes’s treatment of photography in this story anticipates a Bazinian philosophy of images: photography “purifies” reality by emptying it of contextual material. It is an incorruptible entity because it is a pristinely visual one. At the end of the story, Holmes requests a photograph of Adler—alone in an evening dress—as his reward from the king. Watson treats this image as a surrogate for



"A MAN ENTERED."

Fig. 10. From "Scandal in Bohemia"



"HE TORE THE MASK FROM HIS FACE."

Fig. 11. From "Scandal in Bohemia"

Adler herself: “when [Holmes] speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honourable title of *the woman*” (29). There is no separation between Adler the woman and Adler the image here, as though by acquiring her photograph Holmes somehow acquires her. Since Adler outwits and eludes Holmes in this case, his possession of her image can be viewed as a surrogate means of “apprehending” her.

Still, the idea that images purvey identity comes under question in the opening pages of the story, when Holmes establishes his visual acumen by putting Watson under the microscope. After looking over his friend’s body, Holmes declares that Watson has gained seven and a half pounds, returned to practicing medicine, recently been caught in the rain, and that he has a “clumsy and careless servant girl!” (6–7). Watson, as usual, is mystified by Holmes’s logic (“You would certainly have been burned had you lived a few centuries ago”), but here, perhaps unwittingly, the text’s illustration challenges the idea that the story seems to be expressing: that visual images are reliably transparent. Holmes tells Watson, to explain his deductions, “my eyes tell me that on the inside of your left shoe, just where the firelight strikes it, the leather is scored by six almost parallel cuts. Obviously they have been caused by someone who has very carelessly scraped round the edges of the sole” (7). In the story’s original magazine publication, an illustration of this passage accompanies the text, inviting readers to “see” like Holmes and seemingly reinforcing the passage’s endorsement of visually ascertained knowledge (figure 12). Ironically, however, the story’s words do not provide anchorage or relay—the two conventional text-image relationships that Roland Barthes has described (38)—for this image, but instead conflict with it: the instep of Watson’s right foot, not his left, faces the fire, and given the position of his foot in the illustration, it would be impossible for Holmes to view the firelight on Watson’s left instep. What is more, the illustrator, Sydney Paget, has framed the image so that the reader cannot see the effect of the firelight on Watson’s right instep either.<sup>24</sup> What is visually available to Holmes in the story is not available in the illustration, both because of the “error” in the picture and because of its perspective.

It is easy to view the discrepancy between image and text as a mere mistake or miscommunication between author and illustrator, and Victorian readers who noticed the lapse might well have seen it as evidence of illustration’s inauthenticity in contrast to photographic verisimilitude. The inaccuracy highlights, however, an underlying counterpoint to the story’s narrative thrust: vision is not a transparent, unmediated, or direct



"THEN HE STOOD BEFORE THE FIRE."

Fig. 12. From "Scandal in Bohemia"

process, but is “framed” by conditions both internal and external to the viewer. Even photographs are subject to such framing: in any medium of perception, the orchestration of space, image, concealment, and revelation function to shape visibility and discernment. In the world of the stories, everything from houses to clothes to furniture serves as an elaborate control on what others perceive. Such a philosophy of imagery, which sometimes emerges in the stories, is closer to the ideas of Sergei Eisenstein than André Bazin. Eisenstein was interested in montage and visual dialectics; his works show that the placement of an image within a carefully orchestrated sequence and arrangement would imbue the image with meaning. In “Through Theater to Cinema,” for example, he wrote: “Everyone who has had in his hands a piece of film to be edited knows by experience how neutral it remains, even though a part of a planned sequence, until it is joined with another piece, when it suddenly acquires and conveys a sharper and quite different meaning than that planned for it at the time of filming” (*Film Form* 10). In this idea of visuality, meaning does not *exist* in the image, as criminological theory would have it, but emerges through context. In representing female criminals, the Holmes stories begin to develop such a notion of visual meaning; vision then becomes a far different procedure than in the series’s representations of male criminals.

Language’s inadequacies as a means of signification are obvious in the Holmes series: personal testimony is dubious since characters are continually lying, repressed, or blackmailed; letters and government documents are often stolen; notes and handwriting are forged; newspapers and reporters are depicted as unreliable and easily manipulated in stories such as “The Six Napoleons” and “The Final Problem.” Even the stories themselves, we are to understand, are not “faithful” reproductions of Holmes’s detective work. As the narrator, Watson is the linguistic mediator between the reader and Holmes’s cases, and Holmes continually gripes that Watson’s sentimentality and sensationalism corrupt the raw material: “You have degraded what should have been a course of lectures into a series of tales” (“Copper Beeches” 271). Audiences may be grateful not to read the “severe reasoning from cause to effect” (270) that Holmes would prefer, but such metafictional commentary nonetheless reminds us that textual conventions and narrative point of view shape the reality of realism.

While the stories seem to propose that visual, imagistic signification is thus more authentic or truthful than the spoken or written word, when depicting women, they suggest that vision has its own failures as a means

of knowing the world. Adler is perhaps the most obvious example of Holmes's visual limitations. She is beautiful and in no way adheres to the "criminal type," despite being an "adventuress" who threatens to blackmail the King of Bohemia. Indeed, her appearance does not match her behavior in any of the ways others expect. From the king's first description of Adler, the story emphasizes that her outward display of femininity conceals an inward rejection of the norms of feminine behavior: "She has the face of the most beautiful of women and the mind of the most resolute of men" (14). The disjunction between Adler's "face" and "mind"—between her performance and internalization of gender—is what allows her to outwit Holmes.

Watson's conclusion to the story reveals that Adler remains a fixture in Holmes's imagination, as the adversary who "beat" him, long after the case is closed: "And that was how a great scandal threatened to affect the kingdom of Bohemia, and how the best plans of Mr Sherlock Holmes were beaten by a woman's wit. He used to make merry over the cleverness of women, but I have not heard him do it of late" (29). Adler "beats" Holmes, as we have seen, by manipulating outward visual codes of gender. When Holmes meets the cross-dressed Adler on the street, her voice is familiar but he fails to recognize her image:

We had reached Baker Street, and had stopped at the door. He was searching his pockets for the key, when some one passing said:

"Good night, Mister Sherlock Holmes."

There were several people on the pavement at the time, but the greeting appeared to come from a slim youth in an ulster who had hurried by.

"I've heard that voice before," said Holmes, staring down the dimly lit street. "Now, I wonder who the deuce that could have been." (26)

In this scene, we witness the failure of Holmes's reliance on visual means of knowledge. He recognizes Adler's voice, but cannot see through her disguise. Adler is identified as "some one passing," but she is passing in more ways than he is aware. As I discuss at the beginning of the chapter, the illustration that depicts this scene provides no visible hint that the "slim youth" is Adler or even that "he" is a woman (figure 7).

Adler's disguise suggests, quite obviously, the extent to which outward displays of gender can be manipulated and faked: public, visual markers of gender are not a "natural" expression of innate subjectivity.

Cross-dressing may have a long literary history, but here it points to a broader problem with women and femininity in the Holmes stories. Throughout the series, Conan Doyle suggests that women present a challenge to conventional Western conceptions of truth as associated with public space, visibility, and transparency. Jürgen Habermas's theory of the public sphere, for example, details how publicity, openness, visibility, and the pursuit of truth have been coterminous in Western discourse, following the Greek notion of the *agora* or public market as the place of communicative rationality. Adler's means of inhabiting open space, however, involves an elaborate masking rather than a revelation. Habermas argues that the foundation of the rational public sphere, since the Enlightenment, depended upon a separation between the visible public and the invisible intimate or domestic sphere. But here, not only is the boundary between these gendered spheres disrupted, their associations with revelation versus concealment are also disarranged.

Superficially, Conan Doyle's stories seem to support the conventional idea that "public" and "visible" are coterminous with authentic truth. Holmes's metaphors to describe the solving of cases, for example, reveal the extent to which visibility and truth have been coupled in the English language. In "The Final Problem," as in other stories, Holmes uses "exposing" and "clearing up" as visual metaphors to represent the apprehension of truth (253). Similarly, Conan Doyle often evokes publicity to signify discovery. A character in "The Naval Treaty," for example, says: "If we keep our courage and our patience, the truth must *come out*" (235; emphasis added). In "The Norwood Builder," Mrs. McFarlane, whose son has been wrongfully accused of murder, connects manifest truth with a specifically Christian visual epistemology: "There is a God in heaven, Mr Holmes, and that same God who has punished that wicked man will show, in His own good time that my son's hands are guiltless" (38). Her use of a visual metaphor to describe what she sees as absolute truth indicates an underlying presumption of visibility in the Christian notion of "revelation." Despite such conventional usage, however, throughout the series, images and visibility again and again prove unreliable as means of knowledge, particularly problematic with regard to gender identity.

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

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

Watson continues to refer to Adler in such terms, but in this initial description he also offers assurance that she is no longer a social threat: reference to her death dulls the menace that she poses from the opening lines of the story.

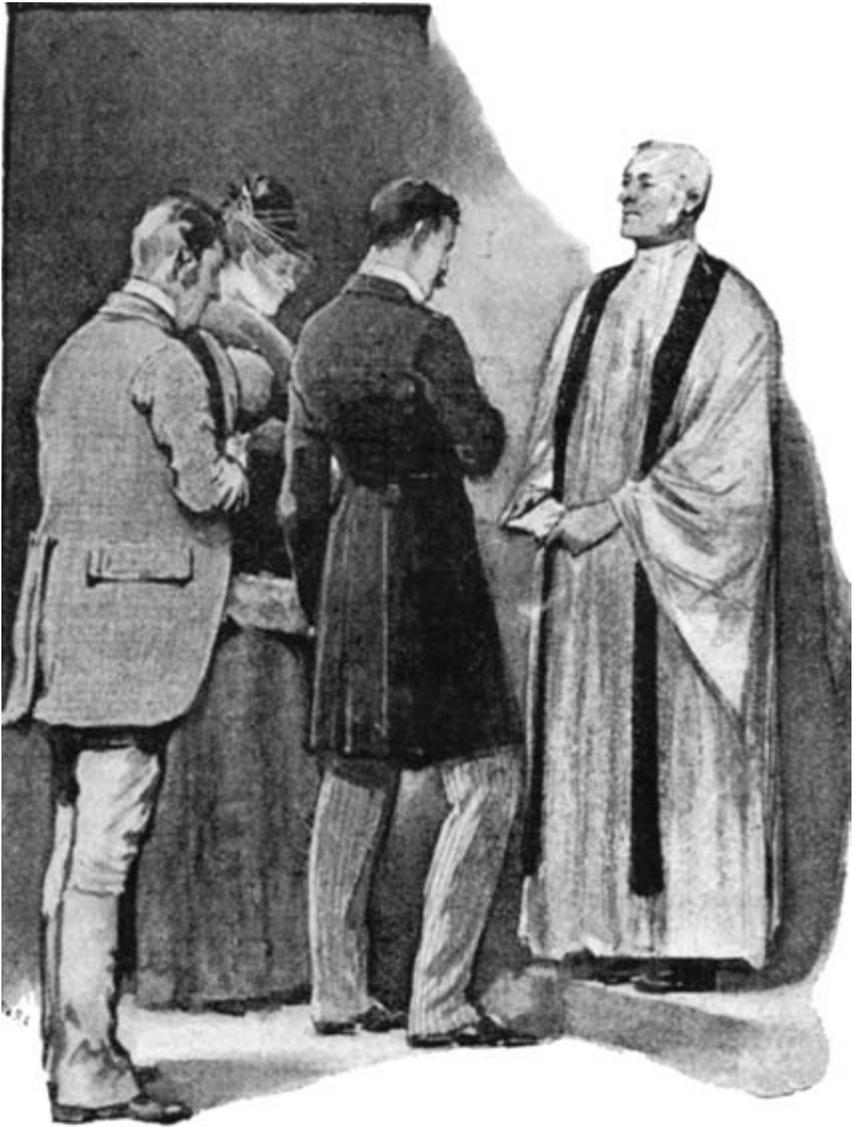
Similarly, at the end of the story, Conan Doyle reprivatizes Adler's public body, nestling her in conventional domesticity via marriage. When she marries Godfrey Norton, a lawyer "of the Inner Temple," she enters the impermeable domestic sanctum where femininity is contained and concealed (17). Adler's ability to burrow into such a position, despite her "dubious" public reputation, suggests that the coverage of domesticity not only "protects" women from public danger, it also imparts to them the means of secreting and manipulating public perception. This has a broader sociopolitical relevance: as women gain more public access on the crest of first-wave feminism, the story suggests, they bring to public culture a proclivity for privateness, veiling, and secreting, dismantling the association between "publicity" and "openness."

As a character, Adler suggests that the visual, bodily language of gender and femininity paradoxically becomes *more* important as feminism provides women greater public access. By means of cross-dressing, Adler eludes Holmes's visual system of detection, but throughout the story her behavior enacts a complicated semiotics of visibility and invisibility, highlighting her mastery of public displays and concealments of self. She has learned this skill, perhaps, through her career as an actress: she is a public celebrity who has learned to exist under cover from the public eye.<sup>25</sup> The king calls her "the well-known adventuress," and assumes her "name is no doubt familiar." Adler is a woman in public circulation, existing, promiscuously, at a level beyond intimate acquaintance. Indeed, Holmes is familiar with more than her name: his files record her birthdate, birthplace, and other facts concerning her identity (12). Despite the fact that her life is in public circulation, Adler masterfully retains control of her physical image. At the end of the story, she leaves a note for Holmes explaining how she outwitted him: "Male costume is nothing

new to me. I often take advantage of the freedom which it gives. I sent John, the coachman, to watch you, ran upstairs, got into my walking clothes, as I call them, and came down just as you departed. . . . I followed you to your door. . . . Then I, rather imprudently, wished you good-night" (28). Adler calls her drag outfit "walking clothes," which, as Joseph Kestner notes, suggests that a male identity allows Adler a public, peripatetic freedom otherwise unavailable to her (77). Even on the metalevel of the story's publication, she retains control over her image: though the story has several pictures of Adler, none show her in a putatively "true" state. We see her crossed-dressed and veiled, but never in a "natural" condition. The story makes no mention of a veil in Adler's wedding (19), for example, but in the illustration of the ceremony, her face is covered by a semitransparent veil (figure 13). We have no undisguised, unmediated picture of the "real" Adler, casting doubt on the idea that such pictures exist at all.

#### LEGAL INTERVENTIONISM AND THE POLITICS OF VISIBILITY

Women's appearance and concealment in public and private spheres is at issue throughout the Holmes series, and Conan Doyle often employs the backdrop of legal interventionism to convey the broader political relevance of this theme. The visibility of women is not only an imagistic and narrative difficulty in the stories, but also a social one. As I discuss in the introduction, the late-Victorian legal landscape was marked by a series of developments that expanded the jurisdiction of governmental influence over private life, opening the home to greater governance. Often, such legal developments occurred at the behest of women's political groups, which marshaled opposition against wife beating, child abuse and neglect, and violence against animals. Prominent feminist Frances Power Cobbe, for example, appealed to state protectionism in advocating for women's suffrage, against wife abuse, and against vivisection; in her 1877 pamphlet "Why Women Desire the Franchise," she wrote: "the natural and artificial disabilities of women demand in their behalf the special aid and protection of the State" (220). Victorian legal interventionism, as a social movement, challenged patriarchal social organization; many interventionist developments depended on women's political organization, and on a more symbolic level, they suggested that the father or man of the house was no longer the ultimate



"I FOUND MYSELF MUMBLING RESPONSES."

Fig. 13. From "Scandal in Bohemia"

arbiter of authority over the home and family. By opening domestic space to the scope of public concern, interventionism correlates with women's increasing public significance amid feminist reform. As a component of momentous social changes in modern conceptions of state, power, gender, and subjectivity, legal interventionism is a key context for late-Victorian fiction, and nowhere is its importance better articulated and explored than in detection and sensation genres. Typically, in such stories, the home is exposed to the public gaze, not only on the level of plot—in which investigators may commandeer the domestic arena—but on the metafictional level of publication and readership. In the forum of illustrated mass-market magazines, 1890s detective series propped open figurative windows to show intimate images of domestic crime and scandal to an ever-wider reading public.

As in “Scandal in Bohemia,” the Holmes series often depicts intimate crimes that bear directly on state or governmental interests. Public and private are virtually indistinguishable in this scenario, just as Holmes himself is not an *official* police agent. A private detective, he is nonetheless aligned with what Louis Althusser would call the repressive state apparatus. Not only does Holmes frequently work with the police and Scotland Yard, he often lets them take credit for cases he solves.<sup>26</sup> Even when Holmes helps to conceal a crime rather than expose it—significantly, all such cases involve a woman criminal or victim—the stories emphasize Holmes's commitment to the spirit of the law if not its bureaucratic realities.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Conan Doyle depicts Holmes as an ardent nationalist, hand in glove with state power and authority: in “The Musgrave Ritual,” Holmes honors Queen Victoria by decorating his wall with bullet holes in the shape of “a patriotic V. R.” (113). He often safeguards royal or governmental power, covering up not only the private scandals of the ruling class but also their violations of public trust, as in “The Beryl Coronet.” In his quasi-official capacity, Holmes thus enacts an authorized intervention into the homes and families of Britain. Several of the stories use visual or spatial metaphors to illustrate this role. Recall the moment in “A Case of Identity,” discussed in the introduction, when Holmes fantasizes about having more domestic access than he already does: “If we could fly out of that window hand in hand, hover over this great city, gently remove the roofs, and peep in at the queer things which are going on . . . it would make all fiction . . . most stale and unprofitable” (30). Similarly, while riding a train in “The Naval Treaty,” Holmes enjoys a privileged view into suburban residences: “It's a very cheering thing to come into London by any of these lines which

run high and allow you to look down upon the houses like this” (228). The pleasure that Holmes takes in such domestic voyeurism is the pleasure of uncovering hidden vileness, like finding a nasty slug beneath a rock; all too often, when Holmes pokes his nose into someone’s home, he finds something slithery and loathsome.

Critics have viewed this interventionist strain in the Sherlock Holmes stories as a symptom of increasing surveillance and discipline of individual bodies by state and society, as theorized most thoroughly by Michel Foucault. Lydia Alix Fillingham, for example, argues that Holmes—as an extragovernmental agent—functions to reconcile British liberalism with a newly interventionist police force. Conan Doyle’s detective series, however, crucially represents state interventionism as a specifically *feminist* strike against a distinctively *patriarchal* authority. Many of Holmes’s cases suggest that the foundations of the “respectable” British home are rotten or crumbling; the source of such decay is nearly always male violence, which serves in the series to justify an interventionist legal philosophy. In “The Boscombe Valley Mystery,” Holmes discovers that the estate of a wealthy northern family was built on the spoils of colonial highway robbery. John Turner, who turns out to be a murderer in the case, admits to Holmes that he made his wealth in Australia as “what you would call over here a highway robber.” After amassing a fortune, he returned to England, “determined to settle down to a quiet and respectable life. I bought this estate . . . I married, too” (98). Despite its accoutrements of respectability, Turner’s home has brutal origins, exemplifying the violent past of colonial booty. In “The Copper Beeches,” Holmes again associates private domesticity with violent abuse; he tells Watson that the image of a country farmhouse, rather than evoking wholesome English homeliness, makes him think of “the impunity with which crime may be committed there.” Watson is bemused—“Good heavens! . . . Who would associate crime with these dear old homesteads?”—but Holmes replies, “They always fill me with a certain horror. . . . the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside” (280).

To Holmes, rural areas are more dangerous because they are detached from the social and legal pressures pervasive in populous areas:

The pressure of public opinion can do in the town what the law cannot accomplish. There is no lane so vile that the scream of a tortured child, or the thud of a drunkard’s blow, does not beget sympathy and

indignation among the neighbours, and then the whole machinery of justice is ever so close that a word of complaint can set it going, and there is but a step between the crime and the dock. But look at these lonely houses, each in its own fields, filled for the most part with poor ignorant folk who know little of the law. Think of the deeds of hellish cruelty, the hidden wickedness which may go on, year in, year out, in such places. . . . (280)

Passages like this have led many critics to view the stories as apologies for panoptical surveillance, but note Holmes's emphasis on the abuse of wives and children: "the scream of a tortured child, or the thud of a drunkard's blow." Feminists in this period were calling for women and children to have equal protection under the law, and this passage presents a genuine need for such protection. The passage reverses conventional notions of domesticity and rural life as idyllic, safe, and peaceful: taking a page from sensation novels such as *Woman in White*, Conan Doyle depicts the isolated family home as a seat of "hellish cruelty" rather than a heavenly sanctum presided over by an "angel in the house." Disciplinary and feminist objectives are not mutually exclusive, nor are they necessarily related, but Conan Doyle's emphasis on paternal violence throughout the series does appeal to a decidedly feminist sensibility of the period. His stories articulate a feminist moral imperative for broader state control over the private sphere. As I discuss in chapter 5, contemporaries such as Oscar Wilde and Olivia and Helen Rossetti make feminist arguments *against* interventionism, but in the logic of Conan Doyle's stories, interventionist legal developments do not represent a new kind of infringement on individual liberty so much as a means of protecting the liberty of the disempowered.

The ideology behind paternalistic, private familial structures depended on the belief that women and children were *better off* when taken care of under the auspices of patriarchy. Such a notion is utterly exploded in the Holmes stories, which present a battery of fathers, stepfathers, and husbands who are not only poor caretakers of their dependents, but actively injurious and destructive. In what was perhaps a nod to women's temperance organizations, much of this abuse is alcohol-related. Several of the stories depict wives and children trapped under the dominance of drunken men. In "Abbey Grange," discussed earlier in this chapter, Eustace Brackenstall's wife attributes his abusive behavior to drink: "Sir Eustace was a confirmed drunkard. To be with such a man for an hour is unpleasant. Can you imagine what it means for a sensitive

and high-spirited woman to be tied to him for day and night? It is a sacrilege, a crime, a villainy to hold that such a marriage is binding” (269). Conan Doyle takes the opportunity not only to highlight the ravages of alcohol abuse and the failures of patriarchal social organization, but to impress upon readers that marriage should not be treated as an indissoluble institution.<sup>28</sup> In “Black Peter,” Black Peter similarly abuses his wife and daughter under the influence of drink: “The man was an intermittent drunkard, and when he had the fit on him he was a perfect fiend. He has been known to drive his wife and his daughter out of doors in the middle of the night, and flog them through the park until the whole village outside the gates was aroused by their screams” (137). Chasing his family outdoors at night and waking the neighbors, Black Peter’s abuse reveals the interconnectedness of the domestic and the public, a central contention of first-wave feminism.

As illustrations of negligent patriarchy, Eustace Brackenstall and Black Peter strike notes in a cultural crescendo: a resounding call for a legal response to abuse in the family sphere.<sup>29</sup> In the world of the series, legal interventionism appears as a salutary corrective to domestic injustice, and a legitimately necessary social change. Rather than alcohol, other stories focus on money, inherited wealth, and capital as sources of paternal cruelty. Many of Holmes’s cases pry open the home to reveal greedy, grasping fathers rather than drunkenly abusive ones, and yet the two groups can be equally merciless and violent. “A Case of Identity,” for example, depicts a stepfather who disguises himself as a suitor, engages himself to his stepdaughter, Mary Sutherland, and then summarily abandons her after swearing eternal devotion. He does all of this to retain control over her small fortune. “The Speckled Band,” published a few months later, features an even more vicious stepfather, who murders one stepdaughter and attempts to murder another by means of a poisonous snake. His motivation is their fortune. A few months later, “Copper Beeches” depicted a father, not a stepfather, who imprisons his daughter and attempts to trick her fiancé into abandoning her, all for her wealth. Conan Doyle published these three stories within nine months, and all feature a father or stepfather stooping to unimaginable cruelty to prevent a daughter’s marriage and retain her independent fortune.<sup>30</sup> The prevalence of this plot echoes a contemporaneous debate about women’s increasing property rights and the extent to which such changes would affect conventional, familial relationships between men and women.<sup>31</sup>

Via new occupations and new laws such as the Married Women’s Property Acts, women were beginning to assert more independence in

the economic realm, which indicates how the trend of legal interventionism was intertwined with women's increasing power and voice in the public sphere. The Holmes stories tacitly support an ideology of interventionism, effectively erasing the legal boundary between public and private, which functioned in part to cordon women off from political and social power. They call into question women's traditional social position of domestic obscurity, by extension recognizing women as public figures. In this way, Conan Doyle becomes the unlikely ally of Sarah Grand, who wants to erode distinctions between "woman's sphere" and the public sphere. Yet his series remains ambivalent and even suspicious of women's public power. Conan Doyle himself, according to Derek Longhurst, was a "well-known opponent" of the women's suffrage campaign, and "berated the movement for its criminal acts against property and offered the opinion that in this exceptional case he was in favour of lynching" (65). In response to such denunciations, militant suffragettes chucked sulphuric acid into his letterbox (Stashower 295). Daniel Stashower cautions that is "unfair to dismiss [Conan Doyle] as an opponent of women's rights" on the basis of his antagonism toward the suffragettes (130), but regardless of his personal feelings, the stories' aversion toward women's new public roles does conflict with their interventionist message.

The stories' ambivalence about women in public is obvious from a particularly fragile visual metaphor that appears throughout the series. A recurring motif depicts a woman standing in a doorway, at the threshold of light/dark, public/private, visible/invisible. Emphasizing this irresolute image, Conan Doyle invokes and reassesses a familiar symbolic function for women in Victorian fiction: to demarcate the line between public danger and domestic safety. In *The Sign of Four*, for example, Watson describes his future wife, Mary Morstan, standing beside Mrs. Forrester at the doorway of their home: "As we drove away I stole a glance back, and I still seem to see that little group on the step—the two graceful, clinging figures, the half-opened door, the hall-light shining through stained glass. . . . It was soothing to catch even that passing glimpse of a tranquil English home in the midst of the wild, dark business which had absorbed us" (51). Watson contrasts the "tranquil" home with the "wild, dark business" of crime, using the language of sentimental domesticity, but also emphasizes the fluidity between the two realms: the "half-opened door" and "hall-light shining through stained glass" suggest porosity and permeability.

Conan Doyle uses an identical visual trope in "The Man with the

Twisted Lip.” Here, Watson depicts his first encounter with the wife of Neville St. Clair—a man who has disappeared—at her London suburban home:

I followed Holmes up the small, winding gravel drive which led to the house. As we approached, the door flew open, and a little blonde woman stood in the opening, clad in some sort of light *mousseline-de-soie*, with a touch of fluffy pink chiffon at her neck and wrists. She stood with her figure outlined against the flood of light, one hand upon the door, one half raised in eagerness, her body slightly bent, her head and face protruded, with eager eyes and parted lips, a standing question. (136)

This threshold tableau, like the last, occurs in a doorway and is equally diaphanous: the woman is associated with lightness and luminosity (“blonde,” “light,” “fluffy pink chiffon”), but her body connotes irresolution rather than enlightenment: her hands, posture, head, face, and lips are all dualistic rather than unified. The ambiguity of the moment foreshadows the story’s ending. While this image taps into a sentimental iconography of home, with Mrs. St. Clair awaiting her lost husband like a suburban Penelope, the conclusion projects a retrospective irony onto the scene: St. Clair, as it turns out, has financed his home, wife, and comfortable private existence by pretending to be a beggar on the London streets.

In “The Engineer’s Thumb,” Conan Doyle twice makes use of this recurrent visual tableau to depict Elise, the female accomplice of a counterfeit gang. The engineer describes how Elise, despite her criminal ties, risked her life to save him: “Suddenly a door opened at the other end of the passage, and a long, golden bar of light shot out in our direction. It grew broader, and a woman appeared with a lamp in her hand, which she held above her head, pushing her face forward and peering at us” (208). Elise, like the other women, is a figure of protrusion at the boundary of light and dark. On the next page, she appears in a nearly identical image: “Suddenly, without any preliminary sound in the midst of the utter stillness, the door of my room swung slowly open. The woman was standing in the aperture, the darkness of the hall behind her, the yellow light from my lamp beating upon her eager and beautiful face” (209). In both passages, Elise appears “suddenly,” emphasizing that she marks a rupture in the textual landscape, a figurative manifestation of the stories’ conflicting beliefs about female visibility.

Conan Doyle's continual use of the ambiguous threshold image connotes a crisis in the Victorian sentimental idiom of "women" and "home." Opening up the home to the detective's gaze, the image suggests, entails a changed conception of women's social role. This is particularly apparent in stories that depict female criminality. In "The Beryl Coronet," for example, Conan Doyle links a misapprehension of women's changed role with a failure to recognize female criminality. In this story, Alexander Holder is responsible for a priceless coronet, entrusted to his bank as collateral by an anonymous member of the royal family. The case is sensitive because an artifact of national heritage has become security for a private loan: "as it was a national possession, a horrible scandal would ensue if any misfortune should occur to it" (248). In an astounding example of his faith in the safety and impermeability of his domicile, Holder decides to take the coronet home rather than leave it in the bank safe: "I felt that it would be an imprudence to leave so precious a thing in the office behind me." The coronet is stolen that night.

Analogous with the coronet is Holder's niece, Mary, whom he adopted as a daughter after the death of his brother. Just as Holder believes the coronet to be safe in his home, so he believes Mary to be a sheltered girl. When Holmes asks Holder if the family participates "in society," Holder responds, "Mary and I stay at home. We neither of us care for it. . . . She is of a quiet nature" (254–55). In the course of the story, however, Holder loses not only the coronet, but also his adopted daughter. Mary, it seems, is not as secluded and sequestered as Holder believes, and both she and the coronet exit the house through the sponsorship of the same man, Sir George Burnwell. Mary has stolen the coronet from Holder's bureau and ferried it out of the house into Burnwell's waiting hands. When Holmes reveals these facts to Holder, he depicts Burnwell as a penetrator of a closed domestic ring: "Neither you nor your son knew the true character of this man when you admitted him into your family circle. He is one of the most dangerous men in England" (264). By paralleling Mary with the beryl coronet, the story follows the conventional literary trope of associating women with precious jewels, the same correlation Wilkie Collins uses in *The Moonstone*.<sup>32</sup> Unlike Collins, however, Conan Doyle articulates the breakdown of a gendered code wherein the visibility and invisibility of daughters can be managed like precious jewels, secured in the confines of the home and publicly displayed on special occasions as exemplars of a family's prestige. After a range of social shifts, women are less subject to patriarchal management, and Mary, the seemingly docile female criminal, remains virtu-

ally invisible throughout the story: her skin is continually described as exceptionally pale and white, a blank page.

“The Second Stain” has several significant parallels to “The Beryl Coronet”: a man again entrusts an object of national significance to the security of his home, again the object is stolen, and again a woman in his immediate family proves to be the thief. In this case, the stolen object is a letter, which Mr. Trelawney Hope, Secretary for European Affairs, has taken home for safekeeping. The peril in this case is not due to the letter’s value as an artifact of national heritage, but to the possibility that it will be published. The letter, from “a certain foreign potentate,” has such incendiary rhetoric that according to Trelawney Hope, “within a week of [its] publication . . . this country would be involved in a great war” (295). Trelawney Hope explains to Holmes that the letter “was of such importance that I have never left it in my safe, but I have taken it across each evening to my house . . . and kept it in my bedroom in a locked dispatch-box” (293).

Trelawney Hope’s faith that the letter would be safe in his bedroom rests on his belief that he has tightly sealed off political matters from the intimate sphere of his home. Even his wife, he assures Holmes, knew nothing of the letter’s existence, and the premier himself praises Trelawney Hope for his ability to hold a national secret “superior to the most intimate domestic ties” (293). The assumption of women’s irrelevance to the public realm proves mistaken yet again, however, and Holmes quickly realizes that the theft must have been an inside job. The story features a nestlike narrative structure: within the outer frame of the political drama are twin domestic dramas concerning the Trelawney Hope marriage and the murder of Monsieur Fournaye at the hands of his wife. Fournaye, a secret agent, led a double life and believed, like Trelawney Hope, that “he kept his life in water-tight compartments” (307). His lives prove more permeable, however, and his wife ends up murdering him in a jealous rage, confusing his secret political life with a secret sexual affair. The story accounts for Madame Fournaye’s murderousness via race—she is “of Creole origin” and is prone to “attacks of jealousy which have amounted to frenzy” (305)—but the stereotype of the “mad Creole wife,” familiar from *Jane Eyre*, does not preclude its broader point regarding the impossibility of divorcing the political from the feminine.<sup>33</sup>

Paralleling Mme. Fournaye’s crime is the theft performed by Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope: she was blackmailed into furnishing her husband’s letter to M. Fournaye, fearful that he would expose an “indis-

creet" letter from her youth. Her husband, she believes, "would have thought [the letter] criminal" (314), yet she maintains that even so, she would not have stolen his letter if she'd had any sense of its significance. Her husband's insistence on concealing all political matters from her notice, according to Lady Hilda, is to blame for the theft: "There is complete confidence between my husband and me on all matters save one. That one is politics. On this his lips are sealed. He tells me nothing" (301). It was this ignorance about her husband's political affairs, she says, that made her prey to Fournaye: "terrible as it seemed to take my husband's papers, still in a matter of politics I could not understand the consequences, while in a matter of love and trust they were only too clear to me" (315).

In attempting to repair the situation, Lady Hilda proves to be a skillful cross-dresser and an adept manipulator of feminine embodiment, like Irene Adler and other New Woman Criminals whom I consider in this study. After learning of M. Fournaye's murder, she goes to his house to salvage her husband's letter, and manages to coax the policeman guarding the house into letting her inside. To accomplish this, she uses disguise and flirtation: dressed as a young working woman, claiming to be looking for a position as a typist, Lady Hilda projects and embodies a type of femininity very different from that of a married aristocratic woman. Under questioning by Holmes, the policeman admits, "she was a well-grown young woman. I suppose you might say she was handsome. Perhaps some would say she was very handsome. 'Oh, officer, do let me have a peep!' says she. She had pretty, coaxing ways, as you might say, and I thought there was no harm in letting her just put her head through the door" (310). Lady Hilda dexterously manipulates her sexuality and her image, but her success in conning the policeman has as much to do with her ability to rein in her body as to reveal it. Holmes asks the officer: "How was she dressed?" He responds: "Quiet, sir—a long mantle down to her feet" (310). Dressed extremely modestly, Lady Hilda convincingly plays the part of a respectable young girl. The officer sees no threat in letting her into the house precisely because he imagines that no one could be less connected to the crime than a woman so covered up. Again, while male criminals in the series prove unable to hide manifestly pathologized bodies, female criminals masterfully transform their image and orchestrate visibility.

The subtlety with which Lady Hilda enacts various feminine roles suggests the plasticity of her image: at various moments in the story, she is the noble wife of a prominent aristocrat, a stealthy thief, an innocent

but flirtatious girl, and, at the end, a supplicating woman penitent. All trace of audacity disappears in the final scene amid her Magdalenesque theatrics:

The butler had hardly closed the door behind him when Lady Hilda was down on her knees at Holmes's feet, her hands outstretched, her beautiful face upturned and wet with her tears.

"Oh, spare me, Mr Holmes! Spare me!" she pleaded, in a frenzy of supplication. "For God's sake don't tell him! I love him so! I would not bring one shadow on his life, and this I know would break his noble heart. . . . Oh, Mr Holmes, I would cut off my right hand before I gave him a moment of sorrow! There is no woman in all London who loves her husband as I do, and yet if he knew how I have acted—how I have been compelled to act—he would never forgive me." (313–14)

Naturally, Holmes agrees to screen her. Lady Hilda's "frenzy of supplication" parallels Mme. Fournaye's "frenzy" earlier in the story (305), again linking the two women's crimes. After admitting her agency in the theft, Lady Hilda carefully corrects herself ("how I have acted—how I have been compelled to act"), but the story indicates that both women are indeed unacknowledged actors in the political careers of their husbands.

#### THE PERILS OF PUBLIC VISIBILITY

Conan Doyle's resistance to visually identifying the female criminal sometimes appears, nonetheless, as a denial of women's public subjectivity, a refusal to grant women full citizenry by refusing to grant them full criminality. The anonymous female avenger in "Charles Augustus Milverton" perfectly exemplifies this tendency in the series. Despite the violence of the murder she enacts, Holmes keeps her publicly invisible by chivalrously covering up her deed; her name remains a secret even to readers of the story. This is not the only case where Holmes opts not to pursue legal redress after discovering a crime, but it is the most obviously illegal instance, since he actually witnesses the murder. On the night in question, Holmes and Watson break into the home of Milverton, a blackmailer, to secure some letters written by Holmes's client, Lady Eva. While searching his study, they inadvertently witness Milverton's meeting with a lady's maid who has offered to sell him her mistress's letters.



“YOU COULDN’T COME ANY OTHER TIME—EH?”

Fig. 14. From “Charles Augustus Milverton”

The maid turns out to be a former victim in disguise. Milverton previously exposed her secret letters to her husband, who died from the shock, and she has returned to enact revenge.

In describing the interplay between Holmes, Milverton, and the avenger, Conan Doyle orchestrates a complicated interplay of the visible and the invisible. An illustration of the avenger shows her thickly veiled—utterly obscured by the accoutrement of feminine propriety (figure 14). Secreted behind a curtain, Holmes and Watson witness her visual revelation: “The woman without a word had raised her veil and dropped the mantle from her chin. It was a dark, handsome, clear-cut face which confronted Milverton, a face with a curved nose, strong, dark eyebrows, shading hard, glittering eyes, and a straight, thin-lipped mouth set in a dangerous smile” (171). While suggesting formidability, this description counters the visual criminal theory of criminologists like Lombroso, who claimed female criminals have racialized or masculine features such as a heavy jaw (102). The avenger speaks:

“It is I . . . the woman whose life you have ruined. . . . you sent the letters to my husband, and he—the noblest gentleman that ever lived, a man whose boots I was never worthy to lace—he broke his gallant heart and died. . . . You will ruin no more lives as you ruined mine. You will wring no more hearts as you wrung mine. I will free the world of a poisonous thing. Take that, you hound, and that!—and that!—and that!—and that!”

She had drawn a little gleaming revolver, and emptied barrel after barrel into Milverton’s body, the muzzle within two feet of his shirt front. . . . Then he staggered to his feet, received another shot, and rolled upon the floor. “You’ve done me,” he cried, and lay still. The woman looked at him intently and ground her heel into his upturned face. She looked again, but there was no sound or movement. I heard a sharp rustle, the night air blew into the heated room, and the avenger was gone. (171–72)

This passage depicts one of the most violent murders committed by a woman in turn-of-the-century fiction, and its graphic illustration brought that violence home to readers (figure 15). Despite the woman’s ferocity, however, Conan Doyle takes pains to rationalize—even defend—her act. Her invocation of her husband and her insistence on her own humility position her squarely in the tradition of self-renunciatory Victorian wifeliness. The scandalous letters do not challenge this charac-



"THEN HE STAGGERED TO HIS FEET AND RECEIVED ANOTHER SHOT."

Fig. 15. From "Charles Augustus Milverton"

terization: we know from Lady Eva's case that most of the letters in which Milverton traffics were written when the women were young and unmarried, and Holmes describes Lady Eva's letters as "imprudent, Watson, nothing worse" (159). Watson's reference to Milverton's killer as an "avenger" also serves to justify her act, as does her seemingly selfless invocation of Milverton's future victims.

Holmes and Watson choose not to expose the avenger. When Inspector Lestrade of Scotland Yard tries to enlist Holmes's help in solving the case, obviously unaware that he witnessed the murder, Holmes replies, "there are certain crimes which the law cannot touch, and which therefore, to some extent, justify private revenge. . . . My sympathies are with the criminals rather than with the victim, and I will not handle this case" (174). Even in the moment of watching the woman unload her pistol into Milverton's breast, while Watson reacts, Holmes holds him back:

No interference upon our part could have saved the man from his fate; but as the woman poured bullet after bullet into Milverton's shrinking body, I was about to spring out, when I felt Holmes's cold, strong grasp upon my wrist. I understood the whole argument of that firm, restraining grip—that it was no affair of ours; that justice had overtaken a villain. . . . But hardly had the woman rushed from the room when Holmes, with swift, silent steps, was over at the other door. He turned the key in the lock. At the same instant we heard voices in the house and the sound of hurrying feet. The revolver shots had roused the household. With perfect coolness Holmes slipped across to the safe, filled his two arms with bundles of letters, and poured them all into the fire. Again and again he did it, until the safe was empty. Someone turned the handle and beat upon the outside of the door. . . . "This way, Watson," said he; "we can scale the garden wall in this direction."  
(172–73)

Holmes not only keeps quiet about the murder, but seizes the opportunity to actively cover it up and destroy all of the compromising letters in Milverton's safe. Committed in cold blood, with premeditation, this crime would presumably be quite disturbing to contemporary readers: a woman shooting a man with a phallic gun in his own study is a perfect example of the kind of invading and destructive threat that characterized many representations of first-wave feminism.<sup>34</sup> In covering the woman's act, however, Holmes ensures that the avenger will remain outside of the public forums of the newspaper, courts, and legal system. Indeed, the fe-

male avenger remains anonymous even on a metafictional level, for Watson refuses to reveal her name even to the “public” readership of the story.

Conan Doyle’s discomfort with women in public cannot alone account for his shocking and remarkable female avenger, however; it does not explain why he makes her at once so appalling *and* so appealing. He takes a potentially threatening woman and normalizes her by providing justification for her act and presenting her as a loyal and loving wife; but he goes on to present her, like Irene Adler, as an object of public desire, idolization, and glamorization. At the end of the story, gazing into “a shop window filled with photographs of the celebrities and beauties of the day,” Holmes recognizes what we might call the “mug shot” for the anonymous avenger:

Holmes’s eyes fixed themselves upon one of [the photographs], and following his gaze I saw the picture of a regal and stately lady in Court dress, with a high diamond tiara upon her noble head. I looked at that delicately curved nose, at the marked eyebrows, at the straight mouth, and the strong little chin beneath it. Then I caught my breath as I read the time-honoured title of the great nobleman and statesman whose wife she had been. My eyes met those of Holmes, and he put his finger to his lips as we turned away from the window. (174–75)

Shop window photography promoting “celebrities and beauties of the day” was part of the new visual landscape of Victorian consumerism. Just as magazine illustrations and newly visual textual formats transformed the medium in which readers encountered crime fiction and other narratives, the display of famous women’s photographs as a means of selling products helped shift public culture toward the visual, consumerist, and feminine. Here, Conan Doyle portrays one such woman—displayed in all her aristocratic splendor to encourage others’ consumption—as a murderer, a sharp distinction from what she appears to signify on a visual, imagistic level. The Holmes series on the whole presents criminality and truth as visually ascertainable categories, but when depicting female criminality, it suggests that the orchestration and framing of an image determines its meaning. Here, the murderer’s photograph is a marketing tool, not a revelation of essential identity. Rather than a low brow, sensuous lips, or a misshapen ear, she has a tiara.

The photograph represents the avenger’s invulnerability: she gets away with murder in part because of her social standing, but more obvi-



“FOLLOWING HIS GAZE I SAW THE PICTURE OF A REGAL AND STATELY LADY IN COURT DRESS.”

Fig. 16. From “Charles Augustus Milverton”

ously because of her image. Conan Doyle's depiction of the avenger encapsulates the entire series' ambivalence about the female criminal, who represents a newly roused feminist power, the failures of patriarchy, and the consumerist appeal of feminine disobedience. The anonymous avenger is not a figure of criminal degeneracy, but of glamour and beauty; she is appealing rather than repulsive to readers. As the illustration accompanying this scene shows, she is literally a representation for the public to admire (figure 16). Thus, while Conan Doyle's stories do commodify feminine victimization, their commodification of feminine violence and criminality is even more significant. At a historical moment when a faction of the suffrage campaign was becoming ever more violent in its acts of civil disobedience, Conan Doyle's 1904 story banks on the allure of feminine disobedience for readers. The avenger puts the anger of first-wave feminism into an exquisite, consumable package. Like other female offenders in the series, her image and body project fantasy and glamour rather than criminological stigmata; she suits a consumerist model of vision rather than an anthropological or criminological one. In consumerist discourse, as I discuss in the introduction, to be visible and noticeable is a form of power rather than submission. Late-nineteenth-century advertisers and marketers preached, unlike Holmes, that it was better to be looked at than to look. They also defined, however, what kind of feminine embodiment was worthy of the gaze. Consumerism redefined femininity as public and visible, but only when it conformed to the logic of consumerism.

Given the series's apparent investment in a criminological theory of vision, one would expect its female criminals to be easily identifiable, but envisioning women is an activity fraught with problems for Holmes, the otherwise expert eye. Women criminals prove capable of resisting the detective's gaze, and Conan Doyle makes a sustained case for legal interventionism, which he associates (not unproblematically) with state feminism rather than state paternalism. Thus, at the turn of the twentieth century, Conan Doyle's stories put forth a far more compound and ambivalent theory of gender, vision, and the public than has been previously acknowledged; they support the authority of the gaze and locate ontology in image, *except* when depicting women criminals. In these instances, Conan Doyle's detective fiction prefigures filmic genres like film noir, in which *femmes fatales* reveal a great "truth" about the visual landscape of modern urban culture: that the unknowable is not signified by the invisible, but by a peculiarly modern disjunction between the visible and the real.