3. The White Man at the Centre of the World: Masculinity in *Sherlock*

**Introduction**

The BBC’s modern adaptation of selected Sherlock Holmes stories has largely met with enthusiastic critical reception and great popularity. The series has sold to over 180 territories, including Canada, Australia, Sweden, India, Japan, Germany and the commercially crucial USA via the PBS syndicate network. The show received the respected Peabody award in 2011, in addition to a selection of Emmys, Baftas and other markers of cultural capital for writing, acting, direction, sound and cinematography. The fandom, meanwhile, is one of the most active and productive on Tumblr, Livejournal, A03 and Fanfiction.net. It is fair to say, then, that we can hardly underestimate the impact of the show in contemporary cultural discourse regarding the construction of masculinity.

The figure of Sherlock Holmes has played a key role in a particularly British discourse of masculinity since his first appearance in *The Strand magazine* in 1887. In fact, as Joseph Kestner demonstrates, the initial publication of the Sherlock Holmes stories functioned to ‘model male gender behaviour’ (1997, p. 7) appropriate to a ‘stabilizing bourgeois, hegemonic masculinity’ (p. 13) in response to a catalogue of social concerns that sound remarkably familiar today: conflicts abroad, loss of British power, the decline of religion, the changing status of women in society and the decline of jobs involving physical labour. As I have argued elsewhere,

> the character of Sherlock Holmes has historically depended upon the triumph of rationalism as an order of knowledge and a logocentric regime of enunciation that renders everything readable, knowable and masterable to the master detective (Fathallah 2014, p. 492).

The detective reassures the reader that the changing world is still readable and understandable. Kestner argues that Holmes and Watson must face and contain a range of threats to proper Victorian masculinity, be it the hysterical and disorderly clients or the symbolic swamps, adders and hounds they meet, address and contain. Holmes himself, with his eccentricity, drug use and disdain for family, exemplifies a rational masculinity haunted by its dark Other, and it is, above all, Watson, the unexceptional
and normative Englishman, who controls and guarantees this suppression. (cf. Toadvine 2012). Watson represents intellect, balanced by athleticism and capable physicality as a counter to Victorian fears of effeminate men. The model of masculinity the Holmes stories construct is rational, logical, courageous and patriotic—though not to emotional excess. It is scientific and dispassionate, privileging mind over body. It is, above all, incisive: able to see, to dissect by seeing, and to master situations and problems though an ordering, controlling gaze. The year of Holmes’ first appearance also saw the publication of criminologist Alphonse Bertillon’s ‘anthropometric system of bodily measurements that he had devised to classify and identify criminals’ (Lavèn 2013, p. 32). Holmes is the visual diagnostician of social ills that Bertillon’s schema requires.

As I will argue, this Victorian construction of masculinity is still privileged in the BBC series, bringing with it a host of problems and erasures that fandom goes some way towards transforming through its intervention in the discourse. This is not to suggest that the construction of Sherlock Holmes in professional media never changes. On the contrary, the flexibility of the much-adapted figure is part of what makes it so crucial to discursive constructions of British masculinity. Neil McCaw demonstrates how, in the UK, TV adaptations by Granada (1984–1994), Victorian nostalgia meshed with a Thatcherite ideology of law and order, patriotism, and respect for authority (2013, pp. 38–42), whereas earlier films like The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes (1970) and The Seven Per Cent Solution (1976) critiqued and responded to rapid social and industrial changes of the 1960s and 70s, constructing a more ideologically critical and more vulnerable detective (O’ Brien 2012, pp. 68–73). In these films, Holmes’ drug abuse is more prominent, and the value and efficacy of his work is called into question: in The Seven Percent Solution, he can solve the mystery of Jack the Ripper case, but is ultimately powerless against the Royal/masonic conspiracy behind it. O’ Brien sees Holmes in the cinema of the 1980s as regressive, by contrast: largely escapist and cynically marketed towards a profitable child audience: this was the decade that produced a teenage Holmes at boarding school (Young Sherlock Holmes, 1985) and a Holmes-esque detective as an animated mouse (The Great Mouse Detective, 1986).

As the most-adapted character in British fiction, it is difficult to make arguments that Holmes is ‘always x’ or ‘never y’ (he has, for instance, been adapted/parodied as a talking cucumber in an episode of children’s animation VeggieTales, 2006). There is not nearly space here to discuss the breadth of professional adaptations: Vanacker and Wynne’s Sherlock Holmes and Conan Doyle: Multimedia Afterlives (2012) is a good place for
the interested reader to start. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that prominent constructions of his adventures exhibit certain hallmarks: Englishness, extreme rational and logical intelligence, vision, control and the superiority of mind over body. With the exception of Englishness, these hallmarks align quite neatly with Richard Dyer's arguments on the construction of White masculinity (1997).

Dyer unpacks Whiteness both as *marker* and *the state of unmarkedness*, whose primary power is its invisibility, which problematically allows it to stand for 'human'. The construction of Whiteness privileges mind, reason and civility over the embodiedness and potential wildness of the 'dark'. Key statements in this discourse can be made in visual language: Dyer argues that the proper White male body, hard and taut, should not 'look like it runs the risk of being merged into other bodies. A sense of separation and boundedness is important to the white male ego' (p. 152). The present BBC incarnation of Sherlock Holmes has not departed very far from this construction of White man, or from the ultra-rationalist conservative fantasy of the society he observes and diagnoses. In fact, despite the technological trappings, I would agree with Balaka Basu that the BBC’s *Sherlock* is, in many ways, more Victorian than its Victorian source: that is to say, it constructs a masculinity whose governing statements are drawn from our post-Victorian fantasies of an earlier, more 'reasonable' era. The construction of an England—specifically a visibly White London—at the centre of global politics mutually reinforces that construction.

Key visual statements in the BBC text ground the discursive constructions of this *Sherlock* in its Victorian sources. The sign '221B' is framed in close-up on the door leading to the flat in the first episode ('A Study in Pink', hereafter ASP). The cars chosen for street views have rounded silhouettes. Victorian costume is invoked through cut and colour (cf. Basu 2012, pp. 199–200). I have observed elsewhere that the deerstalker, which Sherlock adopts in Season 2, consolidates a sense of inevitability to the sequence of citation: it is almost necessary that any modern portrayal return to some mythic essential fundament grounded in Victoriana:

if the modelling of masculinity is crucial to the initial conception and reception of Sherlock Holmes, the modern text’s evocation of its own history gestures to some mythic construction of an essentially British man: a masculine hero for our time that sustains the illusion of an essential rational masculinity for all time (Fathallah 2014, p. 493; cf. Butler 1993 on citation).
The 2016 special episode, ‘The Abominable Bride’ (hereafter TAB), consolidated this construct by juxtaposing contemporary Sherlock with his Victorian counterpart through a series of dream sequences. In the final scene, his Victorian embodiment declares himself ‘a man out of [his] time,’ as the camera pans out from the Victorian living room to the modern streets of London. Moreover, maleness is the default construct of humanity. As John Watson (Martin Freeman) stands over Sherlock’s fake grave after Sherlock fakes his death in episode 2x03, ‘The Reichenbach Fall’ (hereafter TRF), he laments:

You... you told me once that you weren’t a hero. Umm, there were times I didn’t even think you were human, but let me tell you this: you were the best man, an’ the most human... human being that I’ve ever known.

There is an intertextual citation here of Kirk’s eulogy to Spock, the ultra-rational alien of Star Trek to whom Sherlock is explicitly compared in 2x02, ‘The Hounds of Baskerville’ (hereafter THB). In the film Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan, Kirk describes Spock’s soul as the ‘most human’ he has ever known. Even as his humanity is called into question it is affirmed, indeed idealized as the most human, the pinnacle of what ‘to be human’ means. Nonetheless, in the series’ overall construction, John’s influence on Sherlock and the primacy of his narrative viewpoint balances the construction of masculinity across both characters. In some adaptations, Watson serves more as a comic foil to Sherlock’s brilliance. This is acknowledged meta-textually in TAB, when Watson’s Victorian counterpart informs Sherlock he ‘play[s] the fool’ in his public presentation of their adventures only to humour Sherlock’s ego.

Before we embark on a close reading of precisely how the BBC series constructs this ideal of (default, male) humanity, we must take a moment to address the Foucauldian author figures attributed to it, in order to observe how fanfic contests and solidifies the authority of the text. The showrunner position in Sherlock is shared by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss. Both are prime examples of Scott’s fanboy-auteur, and fandom has discursively condensed them into a single author figure with the portmanteau-term ‘Mofftiss’. This statement demonstrates the consciously constructed quality of the author figure: Moffat and Gatiss as people matter little. What matters are their positions and authorial statements, through which they present a united front and attitude to the show. Moffat, whose credentials include fan-favourite Doctor Who, describes himself and Gatiss as ‘the biggest Sherlock Holmes geeks in the world’ (BBC Media Centre 2012). He frequently employed similar discursive tactics to secure his position as a
worthy showrunner for the Doctor Who franchise, stressing his childhood adoration for the show (Harrison 2013). Yet, his relationship with fandom is notoriously difficult. The Tumblr blog ‘Stfu [Shut the fuck up]-moffat’, for instance, criticizes him for fan-shaming, inability to take criticism, and the repetitive construction of one-dimensional female characters. In 2012, Moffat rather spectacularly deleted his Twitter account after several conflagrations with irate fans and has not returned to that sphere of public discussion. He is often criticized for, on the one hand, stressing his own fannishness as a credential and, on the other, dismissing fannish desire as trivial and over-invested. He is keen to retain both his position as a fanboy and the authority over his texts, merging them in statements like, ‘Our own fanboyness about Sherlock Holmes means that there are absolute limits to what we do. Ours is an authentic version of Sherlock Holmes’ (Jeffries 2012).

‘An authentic version’ is almost an oxymoron, and a neat illustration of the paradox at the heart of the fanboy-auteur posture, combined with the possessive ‘our’. Moffat and Gatiss refer to Conan Doyle as their author figure, their ultimate source of authority, Gatiss naming him their ‘absolute God’ (Jones 2014); on the other hand, they stress their points of adaptation and alteration (cf. Hills 2012a). The strongest relevant statements are a meta-textual discussion in TAB, wherein Sherlock quotes his own earlier incarnation from Conan Doyle’s ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’ (1891). Recall that Conan Doyle wrote in first person, assuming the voice of Watson as Holmes’s biographer. Now compare:

Holmes: All emotion is abhorrent to me. It is the grit in a sensitive instrument ...
[...]
Holmes and Watson (almost simultaneously): ... the crack in the lens.
Watson: Yes.
Holmes: Well, there you are, you see? I’ve said it all before.
Watson: No, I wrote all that. You’re quoting yourself from The Strand Magazine.
Holmes: Well, exactly.
Watson: No, those are my words, not yours! That is the version of you that I present to the public: the brain without a heart; the calculating machine. I write all of that, Holmes, and the readers lap it up, but I do not believe it (TAB, transcribed by Ariane DeVere 2016).

In the same episode, the BBC’s garrulous Mrs Hudson objects to her lack of lines in Watson’s literary endeavours. Doyle’s text, then, is constructed as
a fiction, whilst Moffat and Gatiss’s holds at least equal authority. Doyle, after all, is a weak author figure who was never much invested in Sherlock Holmes except financially and offered his usage in fiction freely to all comers. ‘You may marry him or murder him or do what you like with him,’ he telegraphed to dramatist William Gillette around 1900 (Redmond 2009, p. 43), considering the Holmes stories primarily as a source of income granting him time to work on more serious projects.

Further, we should here recall Foucault’s contention that ‘the Author is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes and chooses’ (1991, p. 119): Moffat makes frequent and explicit use of this construction. He safeguards interpretation from fan-interpretations with statements like ‘I think our female fan base all believe that they’ll be the one to melt that glacier [that is Sherlock]. They’re all wrong—nothing will melt that glacier’ (quoted in Ng 2014). Gatiss, another Doctor Who alumni, is generally less inflammatory in his dealings with fandom, yet he, too, is keen to stress his fannishness on the one hand and his authority over the text on the other. He agrees wholeheartedly with Moffat’s professions of fanboy enthusiasm on Sherlock DVD commentary tracks. Indeed, the two position their own work as ‘fanfiction’, apparently endorsing fan production wholeheartedly:

Moffat: We did this as possibly the biggest sustained act of fanfiction, and as a result there’s fanfiction about our fanfiction.
Moffat: And I do think that’s where story telling comes from.
Gatiss: It’s that lovely thing of generating new content around it. It’s the sort of thing that got us into writing (Season 3 DVD extra: ‘Fans, Villains and Speculation – The Legacy of Sherlock Holmes’, transcribed by Ariane Devere, 2014).

Yet, in the same commentary, he discursively contains fandom in its proper place, which is definitely not the place of the proper, author-ized text:

Gatiss: But it’s also not a thing where you can respond to the fact that it has a massive international audience, ‘cause shows go off the rails ...
Moffat (nodding): Yes.
Gatiss: ... if you start trying to direct it towards what you think people will like, or what you think they might fear. We just have to make it for ourselves. It’s a hundred-year-old spoiler, but Doctor Watson does marry Mary Morstan; and you get that sort of slightly-miffed, “You’re not allowed to do this. You’ll spoil it.” But it’s our show (Ibid.).
Consider also the conjunction of ‘fans’ and ‘villains’ in the commentary title, constructing an easy slippage between the two categories separated only by a comma. These statements may be understood as a form of what I call textual provocation: text that provokes fans in the sense of annoyance or baiting, and text that provokes the production of further text. Specifically, the even observation of ‘fanfiction about fanfiction’ may be taken as an invitation to write, whilst the reservation of the true text to the fanboy-auteur(s) maintains hierarchical separation.

Given that the author figure is traditionally White and male, this chapter will demonstrate how masculinity in *Sherlock* is reconstructed in fanfic, yet is paradoxically dependent what is already culturally author-ized: the White male hero with his established history of a model of British masculinity, and the White male author figure behind him. How, then, is masculinity constructed in the author-ized show? The next section performs a close reading.

**Masculinity in *Sherlock***

My analysis of the BBC series suggests that the idealized masculinity of *Sherlock* and Watson is constructed through four discursive branches. In an adaptation of Foucault’s recommendations to begin at the level of ‘event’ before working outwards to conditions of possibility (Foucault 1981, p. 67), I began at the level of individual statements, be they visual or aural, then worked outwards to considered the branches to which they belonged, and the solidity and boundaries of those branches (Foucault 1981, p. 67). I call them mind, body, position, and place. By ‘place’ I mean geographic location, be it country, city, or building; by position, I mean social position in relation to other people. Clearly, all these branches are interrelated: their distinction is for organizational purposes as we study the discourse of masculinity they combine to construct. I have found, however, that the relation of these branches to each other is much more explicit in fanfic than canon. Indeed, canon’s obfuscation of their connection may be read as rather problematic, as will be explored. Bearing that in mind, then, let us address the branches one by one.

**Mind**

As discussed, extreme rational and logical intelligence are key in *Sherlock’s* construction: I would argue they are governing statements (Foucault 1989,
The writers and cinematographers of *Sherlock* use a range of techniques to demonstrate this onscreen. The whole show’s palette is dark, but at least part of Sherlock’s (Benedict Cumberbatch) face tends to be lit, particularly in moments of thought/investigation. This is an intertextual citation of Sidney Paget’s illustrations, which frequently featured Holmes holding up a light or lantern to ‘illuminate his surroundings’ (Scott-Zechlin 2012). Holmes’s rationality is a literal light in the dark. The speed of his thought processes are suggested by close-ups of his face punctuated by swooshing sounds and rapidly-moving images as he makes connections, audibly linking his mind to a computer. As Bran Nichol (2012) argues, computation is also suggested visually through bird’s-eye views of London showing cars moving in neat ordered circuits: this, the cuts suggest, is London as Holmes sees and visually masters it. The imposition of text on the screen, which Sherlock is able to manipulate, depicts him in the act of sorting and ordering the masses of information he has filed away. His stores, however, are not infinite: when he is unsure of the meaning of observed clues, he produces a smartphone and seamlessly links to the broader network of the internet.

The mind-as-computer construction is complicated, however, by the linkage of sex and thought. As Nichol notes, the closest thing to sex in the BBC’s *Sherlock* is the range of ‘oh!’s and ‘ah!’s vocalized by Cumberbatch as he portrays Sherlock thinking: a kind of eroticism is produced in the process of puzzle-solving, of winning the mental game. For Sherlock’s mind is absolutely triumphant over his body—having been shot in ‘His Last Vow’ (hereafter HLV), he is able to save his own life by thinking through the correct way to fall, minimizing blood loss. Slow-motion capture of the process constructs Sherlock’s mind as literally able to slow time, bending it to his will. Later, trapped in a coma, survival is constructed as a willed struggle up a staircase: using the power of his mind, he can force his body to live. He describes his mind as a ‘palace’, a location in which he has mapped his material for access. This is a reference to the method of loci, an Ancient Greek mnemonic device based on storing items of information in the visualized spaces of a building. Though emphasizing the grandness of his intellect, this might also construct his attendant egocentricity as slightly pretentious or risible: as John puts it in THB, ‘He would [call it a palace], wouldn’t he?’

Critical to the construction of mind, Sherlock’s ability to diagnose based on visible information remains unchanged in the BBC series. This is a governing statement, one that ‘prescribes the form(s) of description’ and ‘perceptual codes’ that can be utilized (Foucault 1989, p. 147). According to Jaffe, this ‘fantasy of social control’ through readability is a hallmark of
the detective genre (Jaffe 2000, p. 49). Not only can Sherlock read almost everything about a person immediately upon meeting them, what he primarily diagnoses is personal and social deviance. Offences range from an extra-marital affair between colleagues to implication in a major crime:

Sherlock: Mr. Ewert of Janus Cars had a twenty thousand Columbian peso note in his wallet ...
(Flashback to Sherlock seeing the note in the wallet.)
Sherlock: ... Quite a bit of change, too. He told us he hadn't been abroad recently, but when I asked him about the cars, I could see his tan line clearly.
(Flashback to Sherlock pointing out the window and Ewert turning his head to look while Sherlock sees that his tan finishes at his neck.)
Sherlock: No-one wears a shirt on a sunbed. That, plus his arm.
Lestrade: His arm?
Sherlock: Kept scratching it. Obviously irritating him, and bleeding.
(Flashback to a close-up of Ewert scratching his upper arm, and a drop of blood on his shirt sleeve.)

Sherlock’s mind can deduce anything that is visible. This excludes emotional comprehension, such as the motive for using a stillborn infant’s name as a password (ASP). He protests that the child’s death was ‘ages ago’, and that he sees no reason that the mother should ‘still be upset’ about it. Though John reprimands him lightly for this, the moment is ultimately subsumed in Sherlock’s triumph in solving the mystery.

John Watson is constructed as more capable of empathy, though not particularly emotionally literate, and develops a psychosomatic limp as a result of being unable to process his experiences at war. His mind is resilient yet damaged: the opening of ASP shows him dealing alone with his flashbacks and nightmares from service in Afghanistan. He supresses a great deal of rage, accidentally shouting at Mrs Hudson and immediately apologising in the same episode. Once finally goaded to punch Sherlock in ‘A Scandal in Belgravia’ (hereafter ASB), he is briefly unable to stop hitting him. Despite nightmares from the war, Mycroft accuses him of missing the war more than he is haunted by it. The camera’s responding close-up on Freeman’s face as he performs a giveaway twitch of facial muscles solidifies
this statement. The construction of controlled White masculinity, as Dyer demonstrated, is internally and eternally troubled by what it supresses (1997, especially pp. 34–36, p. 82). What John supresses seems to be masculine-coded reservoirs of rage and violence. In the original stories, Watson faints upon seeing Holmes return from apparent death. In the BBC adaptation, he punches him in the face, a pointed variation of the statement cited. The rational suppression of violence is consolidated by John's dual professions: he is both a doctor (healer/scientist) and a former soldier (fighter/man-of-action).

Body

Sherlock and John are White men. This might seem an absurdly obvious point, but it is precisely this apparent obviousness, or taken-for-grantedness, that demands we interrogate it critically. Media backlash to the casting of Lucy Liu as a female, Asian Watson in PBS's Elementary makes it clear that the fact that these characters are White men means something, which is far too often elided (see Stagg 2012). As Dyer (1997) has demonstrated, the cultural power of Whiteness is its invisibility: Non-White people are racially marked, but Whites are just people, whose interests are ‘human’ interests as opposed to racial ones. White is a flexible descriptor, but Cumberbatch and Freeman are well within its boundaries. Indeed, I would argue that the casting of Benedict Cumberbatch as Sherlock draws attention to a form of elevated Whiteness, as Cumberbatch has the kind of lean height and sharp features that used to be called ‘Anglo-Teutonic’ and directly contrasted to Othered ‘races’ (see Dyer, pp. 52–53). He is a fair physical match for the Victorian descriptions and illustrations of Holmes, with his height, leanness, ‘sharp and piercing’ eyes and the strong chin that ‘mark[s] the man of determination’ (Conan Doyle 1887). This intertextual description hooks into contemporary scientific discourse: at the time, anthropological theories of race and character were generally accepted, and intelligence, morality or lack thereof were routinely read off features. Cumberbatch’s embodiment necessarily carries the echo of such statements (cf. Fairclough 1993). He is, moreover, extraordinarily white in the sense of pigment, a feminizing visual construction and one we will see elaborated in fandom. When Sherlock dismisses his body as ‘transport’, stressing the dominance and control of his mind over it (ASP), the apparent meaninglessness of the White body is made explicit even as the show’s visual language invests it with meaning. John, meanwhile, embodies a contrasting masculinity marked by robustness, strength rather than height, and scars rather than
smoothness: he is damaged, as his intermittent limp and stress-lined skin make visible, but still strong, and damaged by the appropriately masculine pursuit of war.

Fig. 3: Sherlock Holmes (Benedict Cumberbatch, left) and John Watson (Martin Freeman). Source and copyright: BBC.

As Basu has observed, wardrobe choices consolidate the construction of a sober, contained and proper masculinity, allowing for a note of eccentricity associated with ‘Englishness’, which has its governing statements in Victoriana:

Sherlock’s ever present scarf works as a cross between an ascot and a cravat, and his coat, with its ‘pronounced collars and raised lapels’ is, as noted by The Independent’s fashion commentators Paul Bignell and Rachel Shields, clearly a ‘modern reworking of ... Victorian designs’ (Basu 2012, p. 199).

Now this hegemonic construction of the masculine body is never total: if it were, it would be unbelievable. Hegemonic gender constructions in a post-feminist context must be strong and flexible enough to absorb and incorporate irony (Talbot 1997; Benwell 2002). Sherlock draws attention to construction of gender as a performance, as a ‘series of socially sanctioned citations’ (Butler 1993, especially pp. 12–16) rather than an
embodied essence. John mocks Sherlock for acting ‘all mysterious with [his] cheekbones’ and ‘turning [his] coat collar up’ (THB), pointing out the conscious creation of a masculine image by visual statements. Moreover, Sherlock’s bodily performance incorporates statements associated with femininity and lightness: he often appears in white shirts and, in one notable scene from ASB, in only a sheet at Buckingham Palace. Sweeping out melodramatically, in disdain for the ‘boring’ case Mycroft (Mark Gatiss) wishes him to take on, this image of Sherlock’s body nevertheless connotes male authority and superiority via evocation of the toga and Cumberbatch’s hard, thin, defined White body (cf. Dyer above). The construction of White masculinity via the hard body is strong enough to withstand humour, indeed to assimilate it.

This tendency is likewise demonstrated in a key scene in ‘The Empty Hearse’ (hereafter TEH), wherein Sherlock apparently leans in to share a kiss with his arch-enemy Moriarty. As I have argued elsewhere, Moriarty embodies a disruption to the show’s construction of masculinity (Fathallah 2014), through his highly improper performance. He is flamboyant, theatrical, queer, excessive, prone to rages and rants and hysteria. His is the only body that initially evades Sherlock’s reading ability:

[Moriarty] poses first as the boyfriend of lab worker Molly Hooper, and Sherlock (mis)diagnoses him as ‘gay’ through (mis)reading signs of campness in ‘The Great Game’ (2010). These are his ‘level of personal grooming’ and designer ‘underwear [. . .] visible above the waistline,’ in addition to the fact he leaves his number under Sherlock’s microscope. But Sherlock’s ability to read the world, indeed the readability of that world and the stability of an epistemological regime based on such reading, is disrupted by the lack of a gay essence. Moriarty was only ‘playing gay,’ as he later admits, asking ‘did you like the little touch with the underwear?’ (Fathallah 2014, p. 496).

Later, in TRF, Moriarty breaks into the case of crown jewels at the tower of London, dresses in them and enthrones himself, which, taken in the context of his earlier statements, consolidates his construction as a ‘queen’. Sherlock’s almost-kiss with Moriarty almost imperils the bounded construction of his body via the bodily fluids of his opposite—but not quite. At the last second, the kiss is revealed as the fantasy of an over-invested female fan: an instance of fan-shaming in which the fanboy-auteur positions the fan as wrong. She is tolerated, to an extent, even allowed to fantasize, but barred from the production of the true, author-ized explanation. The
boundedness of the male body, then, proves to be a governing statement of this construction, a ‘definition of observable structures’ that ‘prescribes the form of description’ of masculinity (Foucault 1981, p. 447).

Position

The position of White masculinity in *Sherlock*, particularly in relation to women and other ethnicities, is primarily one of command and mastery. This is intricately connected to Sherlock’s ability to see and read, to decode other (primitive) cultures from the position that Said famously theorized as Orientalism (1979). The Orientalist is the master of the exotic domain he surveys and understands, whilst the racially-marked other occupies the position of an object-to-be-known rather than a subject capable of understanding. The Orientalist gaze in Conan Doyle’s stories is well documented (see Thompson 1993; Foss 2011), but the surprising fact is that it persists in this supposedly contemporary adaptation. ‘The Blind Banker’ (hereafter TBB) showcases Sherlock’s understanding of, and ability to dissect a Chinese smuggling operation, read initially through supposedly mysterious ciphers left around London. Sherlock cracks the code and rescues John and his girlfriend from stereotypical Chinese assassins who have been posing as circus acrobats. As Kustritz and Kohnen write:

The smuggling of Chinese antiquities, Soo Lin’s job in a museum, and the Chinese circus all mark Chinese culture as something different and separate from 21st century digital London. Moreover, the representation of Chinese culture as fundamentally alien to modern Britain places the viewer in a spectatorial position complicit with Orientalism (2012, p. 99).

Then, in ASB, Sherlock assumes a position akin to Lawrence of Arabia in order to rescue a white woman from execution by an absolutely anonymous group of turbaned terrorists. These faceless ‘Orientals’ are a literal prop in his performance of heroic White masculinity.

Sherlock’s position with regard to women is also problematic. Said rescued woman is the character of Irene Adler, a self-professed lesbian who apparently turns straight due to the irresistible sex appeal of Sherlock. Sherlock is desired by most women in the series, whom he treats, in turn, with callous disregard or paternal protectivism. ‘Don’t snivel,’ he reprimands Mrs Hudson in ASB, having just saved her from some violent gangsters; and he frequently insults the love-struck Molly Hooper through a mixture of insensitivity and unconcern. Granted, he demonstrates some character development
by Season 2, and appears genuinely sorry to have upset Molly at Christmas (ASB), but by and large he is positioned as superior to and distant from women. In TAB, he gives a problematic speech explaining feminism to the audience and Watson, whilst a hooded army of suffragettes stand by silently and apparently absorb his oration without protest. Yet, in more recent episodes, this position is changing: John, who has had several brief affairs with women, marries Mary Morstan, and after a subplot revealing Mary’s former career as a spy, the domestic trope of pregnancy is introduced, apparently foreshadowing a more settled existence. In an odd change of tone, Sherlock seems to be happy for them, and appreciative and respectful of Mary (despite the fact that she had previously shot him in an attempt to conceal her identity from John). It is thus difficult to argue for a governing statement of position in canon, other than the position of reader-observer linked to the penetrating mind. This domestic repositioning has been criticized as excessive fan-service (Lawson 2014; Baker-Whitelaw 2014), i.e. catering to a fanfic-loving minority at the expense of whatever the ‘real’ text should be. Fanfic does frequently utilize a discourse of domesticity, transplanting characters from action or crime orientated texts into more soap-like settings; but, as we will see, this fandom is more likely to reposition John and Sherlock vis-à-vis each other than alter their relationship to women.

The relationship between Sherlock and John can be described as queer-baiting (Fathallah 2014). The characters look, touch and speak in ways coded as romantic and/or sexual, yet vehemently deny any homosexual possibility between them. Other characters perceive Sherlock and John as a couple, and this is played for humour at John’s embarrassment. In ASB, John capably puts the drugged Holmes into bed, telling him, ‘I’ll be next door if you need me.’ Sherlock asks: ‘Why would I need you?’, to which John replies ‘No reason whatsoever’ before closing the door. The visual statement solidifies the closure of queer possibilities that the dialogue has just opened. Fanfic, as we will see, pries open these possibilities again, reconstructing a British masculinity where homoeroticism is possible.

Finally, with regard to position, we must note that both Sherlock and John are constructed as firmly middle class. John’s profession as a doctor and rank of Captain position him here, whilst Sherlock’s class position is constructed through received pronunciation and a fondness for tailored suits. Were it not for his ordinary lodgings and the parents introduced in the third series, he could easily be read as upper class. John and Sherlock are positioned distinctly against Sherlock’s ‘homeless network’, which he utilizes for information but ‘disinfects’ himself after touching (TGG). The de-humanizing noun ‘network’ removes humanity from homeless people.
On entering a drug-den, Watson comments that he is ‘used to a better class of criminal,’ describing its inhabitants as the ‘scum of the earth’ (HLV). Having been apprehended by police holding the spray can of a graffiti artist they have just pumped for information, John snaps: ‘They’re giving me an ASBO!’ (TBB). ASBO is an acronym for Anti-Social Behaviour Order, a minor British legal penalty associated with vandalism and disruption. The humour of this scene comes from the apparent incongruity between a man ‘like John’, and the sort of undesirable, lower class person who ‘ought’ to receive such an order.

There is a tension, however, between Sherlock’s position as a lone hero outsider, the man who declares ‘alone is what I have, alone protects me’ (TRF); who stands alone on the rooftop of St. Bartholomew’s hospital with the flare of his coat angled to recall Batman looking out over Gotham; who self-diagnoses as a ‘high functioning sociopath’ (ASP); and his implication in a number of social relations (Hills 2012b, p. 31). John is his best friend, and he is willing to undertake a complex and risky scheme to keep John, Mrs Hudson and Lestrade safe (TRF). He trusts Mycroft enough to mastermind his fake-death and disappearance (TRF; TEH) and may have some sort of affection for Molly. Implication in social networks is generally constructed in Western cultures as a feminine position, isolation and exceptionality as masculine. Fanfic takes up this tension and explores it more explicitly, as we will see below.

Place

English nationality has always been a governing statement of Sherlock’s character, and the BBC iteration is intensely London-focused. Despite the complicating paratextual information that the show is filmed largely in Cardiff, episodes open with a drumroll and a sweeping musical score as the bird’s-eye camera pans over famous London landmarks. Sepia-toned shots of Big Ben, the Thames and the London Eye are cut against time-lapse shots of traffic through the city centre (Porter 2012, p. 164), constructing a London that is timeless yet ultra-modern. But Sherlock’s London is selective. As Busse and Stein observe, the camera shies from poorer or highly industrialized areas, preferring chrome and glass or well-preserved Victorian grandeur (2012, p. 225). This London is contemporary yet traditional, mappable, organized and clean. It is available for Sherlock’s reading, and the frequent use of a bird’s-eye camera position allows the spectator to partake in the position of knowing observer.
This London is also the centre of the world. Mycroft, who is described by the other characters as ‘The British Government’, is constantly distracted by the crucial part he apparently plays in foreign affairs like the ‘Korean elections’ (TGG). Other places, notably Afghanistan and vague locations in Eastern Europe, are constructed as threats. John’s flashbacks and nightmares construct Afghanistan as a land of dust, violence and chaos (ASP), whilst Sherlock, on ambiguous secret work in Serbia, is shown to be tortured by shadowed foreign criminals (TEH). At the conclusion of HLV, Mycroft means to send Sherlock on some vaguely threatening mission in ‘Eastern Europe’, a synecdoche that stands in discursively for threatening foreign lands, before recalling him at the last minute because ‘England’ needs him. ‘Other places’ are constructed briefly and often ambiguously, mere snapshots, as opposed to the centrality and clarity of London. The Christmas mini-episode ‘Many Happy Returns’ consolidates this construction with a series of clips of a disguised figure implied to be Sherlock solving difficult crimes around the world, from Hamburg to New Delhi to Tibet. The Orientalist can blend in anywhere, reading every place from his central subject position.

The preciousness of England is never questioned. When Charles Augustus Magnussen, the Danish character adapted from Conan Doyle’s Milverton, is being established as a villain in ‘His Last Vow’, his violation of the Baker Street hearth and so symbolically of England is the discursive key:

Magnussen: Best thing about the English [...] Magnussen: ... you’re so domesticated. All standing around, apologizing ... (He nods to Sherlock and then walks in between him and John towards the fireplace.) Magnussen: ... keeping your little heads down. (He stands in front of the fireplace, facing it. The sound of him unzipping his trousers can be heard.) Magnussen: You can do what you like here. No-one’s ever going to stop you. (He looks down and the sound of him urinating into the fireplace can be heard. John blinks as if appalled and half-turns his head towards him. Sherlock keeps his head facing forward, his eyes fixed on the opposite wall.) Magnussen (continuing to urinate): A nation of herbivores [...] I’ve interests all over the world but, er, everything starts in England. (He looks down again as the last of his urine splashes on the grate in front of the fire.)
Magnussen: If it works here ...
(He jiggles up and down as he ‘shakes off’ and then zips up his trousers.)
Magnussen: ... I’ll try it in a real country [...] The United Kingdom, huh? (He starts to wipe his fingers.) Petri dish to the Western world (transcribed by Ariane DeVere 2014).

This sequence positions Magnussen as the defiler of home, hearth and England that John and Sherlock must defeat. They may have stood stoically by, the model of Englishness, at this outrageous display, but the logic of the genre and the fact that viewers know Sherlock will ultimately defeat his enemies guarantees Magnussen’s destruction in advance here.

Related to the capacity of Sherlock’s mind for reading, and his position as observer-reader, it should be noted that the world he lives in is constructed as entirely readable. As Kustritz and Kohnen explain, the original Sherlock stories helped reassure readers that the rapidly expanding, newly industrialized London of the 1800s was still comprehensible. In the BBC manifestation, his ‘intellectual brilliance and mastery of technology’ demonstrate that the twenty-first century is still equally comprehensible, a construct ‘which ultimately stems from long-standing cultural tropes that structure narratives about securing urban space, and separating criminologists from criminals’ (2012, p. 85). Faces, features, marks have one true and logical meaning, available for the detective to read. The world is constructed as fundamentally logical, interpreted and explained by language. Thus, Sherlock can observe a body and visual a chain of events:

Sherlock: Her coat: it’s slightly damp. She’s been in heavy rain in the last few hours. No rain anywhere in London in that time. Under her coat collar is damp, too. She’s turned it up against the wind. She’s got an umbrella in her left-hand pocket but it’s dry and unused: not just wind, strong wind—too strong to use her umbrella. We know from her suitcase that she was intending to stay overnight, so she must have come a decent distance but she can’t have travelled more than two or three hours because her coat still hasn’t dried. So, where has there been heavy rain and strong wind within the radius of that travel time? (He gets his phone from his pocket and shows to the other two the webpage he was looking at earlier, displaying today’s weather for the southern part of Britain) Cardiff. (ASP, transcribed by Ariane DeVere 2012).

The readability of the logical world is apparently threatened in TAB, where it initially appears that Moriarty has come back from the dead, complete
with mangled head wound. In the event, however, this is only a dream, and the narrative thread concludes with Sherlock's assertion that though Moriarty's influence remains, he absolutely cannot be alive, given the stark fact 'he blew his own brains out' (TAB 2016). In summary, then, we might say that the discourse of masculinity in Sherlock is constructed through the controlling, ordered, penetrating mind, complicated by the suggestion of vanity or pretension; the hard, defined, singular body whether pale and smooth or scarred; and the position of mastery complicated by imbrication in various social networks. It is placed firmly in London, England, and London is the centre of the world. We might draw the discourse construction thus:

**Fig. 4: The discursive construction of masculinity in Sherlock.**

Governing statements are bolded, and a smaller font indicates a less prominent or more contestable statement. There is a little overlap between branches—the penetrating mind enables the position of reader-observer, and the mind and body are both subject to control—but not a great deal. As will be demonstrated, fanfic's reconstruction of the discourse will demonstrate far more explicit links between the branches of the construction, and in doing so, begin to de-naturalize the primacy of the White man's authority even as it depends upon it.
Fandom’s Reconstruction of Masculinity in *Sherlock*

By searching at the communities of high fic centralization (Fanfiction.net, LiveJournal, A03), I catalogued the *Sherlock* fic most important to the (re)construction of masculinity (see methodology, pp. 38-42). At Fanfiction.net, which does not feature tags, I searched for the key terms ‘masculinity, male, man and men’. These led me to search the more fan-specific terms ‘genderswap’ and ‘femlock’. In fic utilizing these popular tropes, male characters either are or turn into women. I kept and coded the fics demonstrating an actual change in sex or gender, as these would help illuminate the fan construction of masculinity via difference. Theoretically, so would the fics wherein Sherlock and John have been women all along, or indeed any fic featuring men, but it was necessary to draw the boundaries of the formation studied at some point, and I judged that fics featuring a male-to-female change would demonstrate the construction most clearly. *Sherlock* fandom on LiveJournal is vast, sprawling and disorganized. Thankfully, there is a centralized community dedicated to searching and finding fic via requests, recommendation and tagging (http://sherlock-search.livejournal.com). I navigated this via the fan-created tags most obviously related to masculinity construction, which were: character study, theme: soldier john (or bamf![bad-ass motherfucker]john); genderswap, theme: have kids; theme: kidfic, mpreg. The trope of turning characters into parents is popular across fandoms, and I was keen to explore the obvious social repositioning this would entail. The relevance of the mpreg tag (a fandom trope wherein a male character gets pregnant via magic, technology or by virtue of the rules of an alternative universe) was obviously crucial to the reconstruction of the male body. A03 proved easiest to search: indeed, searchability and organization of fic is part of its mission statement. The relevant tags here were very similar to LJ, if phrased slightly differently: e.g., parentlock (portmanteau of parent + *Sherlock*), military John, genderswap, mpreg. Notice that the tropes of fandom are already changing the discourse of masculinity, by virtue of their implication in the domestic sphere. Mpreg, genderswap and kid fic predate *Sherlock* the show by decades. Upon entering the fannish space, Sherlock’s character is transformed by these conventions.

Two important tags featuring prominently on A03 are ‘trans-’ (a parent tag covering transgenderism, trans character, etc.), and ‘alpha/beta/omega’. The first is self-explanatory, and obviously turned up a list of fic important to the construction of the gendered body, whilst the latter is a specific fan trope that imbues human characters with the properties of wolves or animals, often involving domination and mating. The ‘omegaverse’, as it is called, is both extremely popular and highly contentious across fandoms,
some condemning it as revolting and sick, some admiring its deconstruction of bodies and gender roles. As Tumblr user lierdumoa summarizes,

omegaverse is really a fascinating fandom invention. 50% of it is totally problematic and reinforcing a lot of fucked up patriarchal, rape culture values. The other 50% is some of the most insightful, subversive social commentary I’ve ever read on gender identity/gender roles/queer oppression (Fanlore 2014).

Interestingly, there is an absolute abundance of mpreg, omegaverse and parentfic on A03: too much, unfortunately, for every example to be coded. For instance, the tags ‘Sherlock (TV)’ + ‘alpha/beta/omega dynamics’ turns up 1075 fics as of 04/02/15, many of which are hundreds of thousands of words in length. That genres focusing on the animalistic, the domestic and the bodily are so popular in the fandom demonstrates a strong transformative effect. In order to code a sample of relevant fics from these massive categories without falsifying the data on comments and averages, I coded the most popular ten, the least popular ten, and ten from the precise middle when listed by number of comments. The numeric results were as shown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Table of fic distribution for Sherlock.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Site</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of fics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest number of comments on a fic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lowest number of comments on a fic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of comments on a fic (mean)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average number of comments on a fic (median)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The total number of fics was 402, ranging in length from <100 words to hundreds of thousands. The mean number of comments on a single fic, dispersed across the sphere, was 143.7, whereas the median was 15. It is important to consider medians as well as means when judging the impact of a fic, as the mean is inflated by the rare highest values in the thousands. Considering only means, a fic receiving 80 comments on A03 may appear to have less impact on the discursive construction than it does in reality, given that it still received more attention than the majority of fanfic. Many fics appeared on multiple sites, hence the total number of fics is smaller than
the sum of the fics on each site. The total number of comments coded was 57,767, of which a marginal 66 were unambiguously and entirely negative. LJ user thedeadparrot reflects on the fannish convention for praise over criticism with the metaphor that ‘fandom is a giant karaoke bar’ (2007): online fanfic is acknowledged as an amateur practice from which we all derive free entertainment, so whilst we might cheer and acknowledge when an amateur is extremely good, we generally do not complain too much when they are bad. This important structuring convention, an internal regulation in Foucault’s terms (1981, p. 56) might mean that more experimentation and risk taking is possible here than in professional settings, but it might also mean that problematic consolidations are more likely to go unchallenged. Out of the 66 negative comments total, 12 responded to the same fic, indicating an extraordinary degree of resistance to its statements. This instance will be discussed below.

The remainder of this chapter demonstrates how fanfic reconstructs the discourse of masculinity in *Sherlock*. Once again, the analysis was conducted by moving outwards from specific statements to general patterns and finally establishing the conditions of their possibility (Foucault 1981, 67). I will argue the fandom’s reconstruction of the discourse of masculinity can be illustrated like this:

**Fig. 5:** Fandom’s reconstruction of masculinity in *Sherlock*. 
The first point to note here is how much more varied the construction is than canon, which is only to be expected giving the spread, variety, authorship and creative contexts of fanfic. Secondly, we should note that while the construction of mind and body overlap slightly in canon, fandom collapses the distinction. Thus, the reconstruction of body and mind will be addressed first, leading into the construction of sex and sexuality (which is generally absent in canon). Further, observe how the boundaries between all the branches are porous, and each affects all others. I argue that this transformation is important and progressive, demonstrating that the central position and mastery of the White, bounded, male, middle-class, rational genius from London is not natural, but the result of a set of contingent social and political circumstances. As will be discussed, the only governing statement that remains is that of Whiteness (bolded).

With regards to the authorial positioning of the fic, it should be noted that disclaimers of ownership over the characters were not as common here as in the other fandoms. They do appear, typically in a form such as, ‘original characters are owned by Arthur Conan Doyle, these versions are owned by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss. I just get to play’ (Ibegtodreamanddiffer 2012), but did not feature very frequently or prominently. Moreover, consider the statements here. Though ‘play’ is modified by the minimizing adverb ‘just’, the use of monosyllabic words to form a short declarative sentence asserts the fan-author’s right to transform the characters: thus, whilst fanfic is dependent on reference back to originating author(s), it also claims its own legitimation. Flegel and Roth suggest that ‘the idea that too much “play” in one’s writing makes it less true, and therefore, possibly nonremunerative labor, seems to inform even fan constructions of fan writing,’ with ‘fun’ being set apart from ‘legitimacy’ (2014, pp. 1098–1099). I would argue the context of an extended creative work, contributing to a transformative archive, renders this ‘play’ a rather serious business in a cultural if not financial sense of legitimation. The legitimation paradox operates here: reformation of masculinity derives authority from the figure of the White man, and the industrial authorship behind him, yet simultaneously asserts its right to that reformation.

**Body–mind**

Fanfiction is notoriously concerned with bodies (Coppa 2006). *Sherlock* fanfic is no exception, and focus on Sherlock’s body is prioritized over mind and deductive processes. Indeed, very little attention is paid to the processes of reasoning and solving crimes that takes up so much
time in the canon series; imported into the space of fandom, Sherlock is removed from the context of a detective series. In accordance with Fairclough’s observation of intertextuality, this has multiple consequences. Statements from fic (re)construct Sherlock’s defined White body in literary terms, as ‘a pale marble statue. A Michelangelo’ (DoctorBilly 2014), as having ‘flawless pale skin’, (telelectricpirate 2012), an ‘alabaster torso’ (hamishholmess 2014a), as ‘the epitome of a self-contained man, a foreign and dangerous planet locked within a six-foot-something frame of whipcord lean muscles and viciously focused intent’ (Ergott 2011). Yet, it also stresses androgyny, lingering on ‘high cheekbones’ or ‘full, pink lips’ (Ibegtodreamanddiffer 2012). Everything-in-focus-94 makes the point explicitly:

Sherlock is the chiselled creature that is the epitome of what a woman should be, all high cheekbones, that perfectly coifed and styled hair, the clothes that cut the perfect silhouette and eyes that would look out of place on a model on the cover of Vogue. And yet, he’s not (2012).

Likewise ZabellaCookie has John observe that ‘any model would kill to have his bone structure, male or female’ (2010). Moreover, the comparison to a statue is almost always a set-up, a forerunner to descriptions of weaknesses, chinks in armour or ‘walls’ proved ‘paper thin’. The catalyst is typically emotion for John. Moelock’s The Man Who Can’t Be Moved literalises the trope, for in this story

The statue called Sherlock Holmes was magnificent. He rose six feet tall and was carved from the finest marble in the entire world. Rich curls on his head were chiselled with such care and precision, it looked as if it would flow along with the summer breeze. His expression was pompous, as if he knew of his unparalleled beauty, and his head was tilted upwards, watching the sky with curious, sharp eyes. His body was lean and smooth, a perfect rendition of what Adonis’ might have been (2012).

As one might guess, affection for John causes him to come to life via a literal softening of the body. The story does not make a huge impact, gathering 14 reviews on Ff.net, but it neatly illustrates a common trope of Sherlock becoming humanized via softening.

John’s body, on the other hand, is typically constructed as scarred and damaged. Where canon shies from the explicit depiction of this (we do not even see John’s scar), fandom makes much of it. Hammishholmes’s
Afghanistan or Iraq explores the damaging effects of war on mind and body:

“Please, god, let me live.” John was sobbing. A long slice, half the length of his forearm, began to blossom blood from his ribs [...] The tears felt hot and ran through a coat of dirt and filth on his face. He wished he could drown (2014).

Through tears and blood the body loses its definition: the bounded body leaks. Sherlock is typically intrigued, indeed excited, by John’s damaged body:

“Lovely,” Sherlock finishes, and drops his cards face-up on the table, stretching out a hand toward the web of raised red scar tissue that covers most of John’s left shoulder. “Can I touch it?” [...] “I prefer damaged things,” Sherlock says, and traces his tongue-tip up the winding scar at John’s hip. “Much, much more interesting” (Ibid.).

Damage rather than smoothness is eroticized (cf. the sheet scene) and with it comes a repositioning of the men into a homoerotic relationship. Fandom also explores the consequences of war upon the body in action, something only inferred through flashbacks in canon: Afghanistan or Iraq is a popular fic, receiving 259 positive reviews on A03; but fics that transform Sherlock and John’s bodies in more direct ways tend to be even more popular.

Consider the well-received Copy That, which gathered 72 comments on A03, a total of 87 across the websphere, a recommendation from LiveJournal, and circulating recommendations on Tumblr. The author’s summary sums up this story neatly: ‘Afghanistan changes a man, some more than others. In which John develops the ability to transform into any animate being he sees’ (maybemalapert 2012). In this fic, the bounded masculine body is absolutely unbound: by speaking the magic words, ‘copy that’, John transforms variously into a fly, a mouse, a caracal, Sherlock, his own reflection, and poignantly, an enemy soldier:

“Copy that,” John gasps out. A bullet ricochets off the rock, and John’s body spasms [...] He changes, hair darker, eyes and skin, too. Gone is his uniform, and everything else that marks him as a doctor, a soldier, a British citizen.

Someone on his own side of this war.
Instead he's looking down at the body of an Afghan man (around fifty years of age if he's any judge), who's bleeding horrifically from an arterial wound in his thigh (the pain of it is not immediate; it waits for the dawning horror to settle first; when it comes, though, it hurts as much as such a wound should). There's a groan; someone's saying, “fuck,” and John thinks it must be him, but then there's the sound of movement and at the edge of his vision he can see a gun aimed at him, held by Davis's hand (maybemalapert 2012).

The transformation is constructed as a painful process, and by the transportation of his mind out of his body, John is literally forced to experience the perspective of the Afghan, inverting the Orientalist perspective of the source text. So this fic also works to reconstruct masculinity via place and position, explicitly connecting them to the White body. Interestingly, though, the magic term that recalls John to his own body is his name: ‘John Watson'. This strong statement indicates an essential, bound self, a correct fusion of body and mind. ‘John Watson' can experience the perspective/body of the other but does not dissolve into it: borders can always be redrawn.

Yet more dramatic transformation, and more dramatic integration of body and mind, is evident in mpreg and alpha/beta/omega fic. These tropes borrow intertextually from broader fandom history, and as noted above, prove very popular in Sherlock fic, though not unproblematically. ‘Pregnant Sherlock is like a trainwreck you can't look away from,' observes an anonymous commentator (anon. 1), and comments comprising some variation of ‘I don't normally read mpreg, but...' were quite common. This pattern suggests a radically transformative urge towards the body-mind synthesis of the male protagonists, yet one tempered by unease and reservation. Indeed, this unease and reservation is often played out in the stories themselves. Vulgar Shudder's Omega Refuge spans both categories, receiving 178 positive comments on A03 and 62 on Ff.net. In this story, John is an omega human and thus capable of pregnancy. Sherlock, meanwhile, is an alpha driven by impulses coded masculine. In this story, as with most of its genre, Sherlock's struggle is to integrate his mind with heightened bodily experience.

“You've really got to keep your hormones under control” [John reprimanded him]. “First you come barging in here like you care, now you're getting all dewy eyed at the thought of me and a baby. You may be on suppressants but your alpha hormones are running rife.”

Of course, Sherlock is lying: he is increasingly affected by a biological urge to protect John and his unborn child. As will be explored in the ‘position’ section, this altered biology has obvious social consequences. In this story, an unplanned pregnancy has effectively ended John’s military career. The explicit linking of bodies and social position is something that fandom’s reconstruction of the discourse accomplishes, but canon elides.

The ability to bear children compromises the construction of the bounded body, accompanied as it is by blood, fluid, and intermittent vomiting. Statements that are jarring out of context due to the conjunction of male pronouns with body parts associated with women are absolutely commonplace in these fics, such ‘John’s water broke on their way down the stairs, staining his pants as well as both his and Greg’s shoes’ (Sandyleee007 2012). The pregnant male body leaks all over the place. A pregnant Sherlock struggles especially with the mental effects to which his body subjects him, exclaiming, ‘My body is betraying me, John. You know what I’m like. It’s just bloody transport and I’ve had it so tightly under control and it is mocking me. My body is doing this just—just to spite me!’ (emptycel 2014). Sherlock’s canonical statement that his body is ‘transport’ is cited and reconfigured: a popular trope in mpreg fic. The body controls the mind as much as the mind controls the body. To ignore the body has repercussions. Sherlock states in canon that he ‘deletes’ unwanted information (TGG), and is horrified to realize in He Deserves It by always-black-and-white that ‘he had deleted one of the most important things about his ‘transport’: the ability to carry children’ (2014). Similarly, in another fic, he admits in first person that ‘Sherlock Holmes gets scared. A lot. Just hides it well. Not now. With all these fresh hormones rampant through my post-birthing body, no, I can’t control it’ (DannyPhantonOfTheAvatar 2014). Increased ingestion is another trope. Sherlock asserts in canon, ‘I don’t eat when I’m working. Digestion slows me down’ (ASP). The ability to refuse food is a clear demonstration of the mind’s control over the body, and an establishment of borders. Mpreg writers tend to invert this for purposes of humour:

“We just need a little extra money for the babies—where did you get chicken?”

Sherlock had popped out of the kitchen while John was talking, a chicken leg hanging from his mouth.
“I stashed it,” Sherlock said, looking mildly ashamed of himself. “It’s cravings, John. You wouldn’t understand. If you had eaten it, I would have cried. Tears and everything. God, this is horrible” (emptycel 2014).

The male body is constructed as leaky, penetrable, reproductive and with far more malleable borders than canon would allow. And yet the approval and legitimation of this reconstruction depends on the already-established category of maleness. ‘I love these AU’s where women seem to die off or don’t exist and men can have babies,’ comments Yaoi-Hellian (2013). Ao3 user perp posted a short fic wherein a female omega John (Joan) gives birth on a case, specifically ‘to add more females into the omegalverse world because [she] feel[s] like there aren’t enough’ (2014) and received no comments. Maher makes a corresponding argument concerning the male-pregnancy movie Junior, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger: that whilst pregnancy is celebrated as transformative, its positive depiction is limited to the male body, ‘marginalizing women’s reproductive capacity and activity’ (2008, p. 279). The legitimation paradox is at work here: the leaky, pregnant, reproductive body is made acceptable almost solely via maleness.

Some fic involving animal transformation plays with the boundaries of genre, and borrows intertextually from literary traditions. For instance, A Rose by Any Other Name recasts John and Sherlock as Beauty and the Beast respectively. Irene Adler is cast as a sorceress who put a spell on Sherlock for his cruelty, but as ‘she began to curse him, planning on turning him into a monstrous dragon [...] he pulled out of her grip, leaving him with a few dragon-like characteristics. Although the transformation wasn’t complete, he looked monstrous and hideous, like a mutation’ (Consulting Writer M 2013). Again, the body is un-bounded, with Sherlock caught in an in-between state. In keeping with the fairytale, he is re-humanized via his relationship with John, who is unafraid of his hideous form and aggressive posturing. ‘Act like a gentleman,’ Sherlock reminds himself, the statement citing the Disney version of the fairytale: ‘Act like a gentleman. Act like a gentle...man.’ The dragon-hybrid may be able to act the part, however, but Sherlock can only be man when returned to his canonical form.

Nicodiver’s The Bloodline combines mpreg and animal-transformation to cast Sherlock and eventually John as alpha/beta/omega werewolves in a fic intensely concerned with the leakiness and porousness of bodies. Though Sherlock’s ability to transform is celebrated, and the fic is full of imagery of blood, tears, ripping, and transformation, the scents of ‘blood, werewolf, steel, infection, sweat’ (Nicodiver 2012), this fic also constructs the leaky body as potentially dangerous and excessive. Before John is aware Sherlock
can transform, he believes that a monstrous wolf is on the loose and on capturing it explains to Lestrade:

“I’ve got the murderous animal.”
“What?”
“It has eaten up Sherlock.”

The main threat in this fic is of a wolfish savagery consuming the human men, characterized by the evil wolf Moriarty. Moriarty is animal, dangerous and seductive. He appears as a ‘gigantic black wolf [...] eyes brimming with darkness and blood-lust [and it] had long and sharp fangs sticking out of its long snout and big muscles.’ When John evades his gaze, Moriarty penetrates his mind:

“No John. Don’t look away.” John could hear a deep voice echoing inside his mind. John pretended not to take notice of it. He could hear the wolf’s paws moving closer to him and suddenly he could feel warm air fanning his hair.

“Your smell is sooo delicious...! I understand why that Sherlock boy likes you so much...” the wolf said with an over excited voice and put his head on John’s lap, staring up at him with amber glowing eyes [...] “Now pet me” (Nicodiver 2012).

John, being captured at the time, has little choice but to obey, causing the wolf to ‘hum pleasingly’. In canon, Moriarty is a challenge to social order; in this fic, he is the seductive threat to the unity of the body and the family. During the critical fight scene he ‘let[s] his face be torn to threads, in fact—he seemed to like it since his face wore a big, Cheshire cat like grin’. Moriarty is the king of opened bodies, and what is more, in this story, he actually kills Sherlock by ripping the infants from his womb in what must be the ultimate deconstruction of the bounded body, ‘gripping the sack with the baby inside with his paws and ripping it out of Sherlock’s body. Blood poured out of Sherlock’s guts, his body desperately trying to heal everything up.’ Granted, Mycroft kills Moriarty immediately afterwards and the family is restored with an epilogue of John telling the tale of their valiant father to their surviving children, but the force of these deconstructive statements remains.

*The Bloodline* demonstrates an extreme transformation of some governing statements in canon discourse. Compare the hard boundedness of the White male body that governed the canonical construction. This fic’s impact
is significant, with 256 comments across the websphere, but many of the reviews are ambiguous in their appreciation:

Characters are way out, sherlock doesn’t like mycroft, he would never help out like that, or cry, or be that timid... but its still a lovely story [sic] (MyCumblrbatch 2013).

sherlock sounds like he is about eight or something (SenpaiNoSasuke 2012).

John’s not an animal person :o (3, 2012).

‘Animal person’ takes on a double meaning here, suggesting both a person who likes animals, and a person who is an animal, or animalistic. Commenters are concerned with the integrity of the canon characters, though they tend to mitigate their criticism with appreciation of the narrative. To transform the governing statements concerning the integrity of the male body is not a simple process, and generates friction. Internal mechanisms of regulation are at work here (Foucault 1981, p. 56) in the resistance to dramatic alteration of canon characters.

Moreover, there are limits to the degree of both leakiness, irrationalism and animalism that can be attributed to the male body without backlash. An anonymous reviewer rejects an mpreg story that is judged to have crossed a line:

I know the mpreg makes a difference, but even so, everyone is really really out of character. It’s kind of hard to read. I rather think Sherlock, upon finding himself with child, would blink in surprise, then experiment on himself to find out why [...] All this wailing and whimpering is not at all in character, even with extreme sickness (anon. 2 2013).

Similarly, a reviewer calling themselves ‘CriticalAnalysis’ comments ‘I find that your Sherlock and Mycroft are very out of character’ (2013), a statement strengthened by the username that lays claim to a rational and objective perspective. Internal mechanisms in this discourse, then, discipline the attribution of excess to pregnant males (cf. Foucault 1981, p. 56). Maher notes a similar point: that whilst a man may get pregnant in _Junior_, ‘the unruly pregnant body is not allowed to engulf him’ (p. 283). Unlike a woman, he does not ‘disappear into gestation’ (p. 284), and a construction of Sherlock that subordinates his ‘character’ to the pregnant body is rejected. Moreover, the story that received an exceptional 12 explicitly negative reviews, as well
as many more ambiguous ones, was criticized on the grounds of rendering the alpha Sherlock and omega John too animalistic and excessive, and placing too much responsibility for what is judged an act of rape on hormones. Responses include:

Ok, i know this is a fantasy and you have every right to write whatever you wish, but you have really lost me with this chapter [sic] (anon. 3 2014).

To be honest this story was my ‘guilty pleasure’ before this. Now I’m just... I’m disturbed, disappointed, and slightly disgusted. Really, really disturbed (Belle 2014).

I am so disgusted by how this chapter ended! No I am enraged, pissed off! [...] What happened ruined this fanfic for me! (Kataryna_Krimson 2015).

There are plenty of approving reviews too, but for a single fic to receive this degree of censure and rebuke, indeed expressions of disgust, is unusual and demonstrates that although fandom reconfigures the discourse of mind and body into a more integrated whole, the civilized mind is ultimately called on to prevail. Here is a strong demonstration of the internal regulation of discourse, though influenced by external norms.

Finally, we must address the category of trans* or gender-variant fic. Some fic separates maleness from Sherlock’s body, constructing him as having been born in a female body. Here again, the construction of the body as transport and separable from the mind is contested:

Across his right leg, Sherlock carved Girl.
On his left, hand slightly more steady, he wrote Boy. The edge of the Y dripped, trailing into the crook of his thigh muscle.
Neither word fit when he looked in the mirror, and so he slashed the words to ribbons, uncaring of the sting or the pull of the blade. Uncaring really of everything, as he lay on Sebastian’s dirty bathroom floor, the fluorescent light keeping him awake and nightmares at bay even as his thoughts tore him apart. His Mind-Palace was far more frayed than his skin could ever be (twistedthicket1 2014).

It is much more typical for Sherlock to be constructed as trans* than John, and this may well be related to the feminine-coded bodily details noted earlier. Consider the author’s note to the pointedly-titled, ‘Sherlock Holmes is a great man’: 
AN: Okay. This is one of my much, MUCH more out there stories. I recently read a story centered around Reid/Morgan from Criminal Minds featuring Reid as a FtM that was incredibly well done, and it got me thinking. Both MGG and B. Cumberbatch are slender, frail, rather ethereal looking, and if Reid could be an FtM then why couldn't Sherlock? (Samuel MacIntyre 2011).

The authority seized to make the transformation is sourced both in visual details of the canonical show, and an ‘incredibly well done’ work of fanfic. This is another instance of how when a text enters the discursive spaces of fandom, it is impacted by previously existing conventions and tropes. A key line in HLV provided more material for fans to source. As they part, Sherlock confides in John, ‘Sherlock is actually a girl’s name.’ John laughs, and the moment is played off as a joke. Sharadas’ Impossibilities, a title that may refer poignantly to the prospect of mainstream media representation of trans* people, reconfigures this:

Sherlock is actually a girl’s name, however?

John’s reaction to that, more than the plane itself, more than the accepted, painful choice of shooting Magnusson—John’s reaction, laughter and disbelief, was his death sentence, and he closed his eyes, forcing himself to become once more that tower of emotionless masculinity, that deductive force that showed emotions only as a play, that man who John knew and seemed, sometimes, to love. Sherlock had told him, a parting gift, the secret of his birth that by now only his blood family knew.

And John, wonderful John, had, unknowingly, thrown the gift away (Shadaras 2014a).

Commenters express a wistful hope for this to be the canonical explanation, yet at the same time Shadaras acknowledges that it ‘didn’t happen,’ thus the fan ‘can only dream and write’ (2014b). Similarly, morelindo’s There is a Crack in Everything neatly reconfigures canon details including Sherlock’s ‘bone structure’ and drug use (here testosterone rather than nicotine), and the author comments that ‘the main reason why this idea wouldn’t let me go is just how well it fits with the canon of the show, to the point where trans!Sherlock is nearly headcanon for me.’ This fic contributes impactful statements to the discourse, gathering a total of 79 positive comments across the websphere. It has also been recorded as a podfic. Morelindo notes that s/he would ‘highly doubt that it’ll go that way in canon (as I see the line itself as a bit of a throwaway joke on the writer’s part), but I felt it
was a valid interpretation of the line’ (morelindo 2011). Authority is again claimed by the fan and yet legitimated by the source text.

In sum, then, fanfic reconfigures the primacy of mind over body into a more integrated whole. Emotion and mental trauma is felt physically whilst neurochemical changes manifest in the physical form. Fanfic opens the male body, rendering it more receptive, penetrable, productive and porous, but there are limits: statements judged excessive or over the top meet with censure via internal mechanisms of regulation (Foucault 1981, p. 56). The male body in fanfic is more gender-variant; yet, here especially, as with all the reconstructions, we can see the paradox of legitimation at work as fandom legitimates its work with reference to the author-ized source text. As I have observed, bodily reconfiguration has serious consequences in fandom for social position. This will now be explored.

**Position**

Fanfic frequently constructs a character’s backstory. A large portion of *Sherlock* fic addresses John’s time in the military and its repercussions: as noted, ‘BAMF!John’ is a popular tag. In dhampir72’s *Disappear*, John takes on a secret revenge mission after Sherlock’s death in TRF, reconstructed as a secretive, deadly assassin aided by his connections with the powerful Holmes family:

> John took his gun and his wallet, placed them down onto the mahogany desk that separated him from Mycroft Holmes, and said: “Make me disappear.” And Mycroft Holmes did (dhampir72 2012).

His healer/doctor side is erased, and he is reconstructed purely as killer, equipped with a range of phallic weaponry and isolated from his former community. He pursues and decimates Moriarty’s network, yet in the intertextual echo of the revenge tragedy, this position is an untenable one: John ‘felt nothing but emptiness by day and full of broken glass at night,’ forgets the colour of Sherlock’s eyes, and with his mission complete has nothing left to do except commit suicide. The violent, phallic, deadly and isolated position of the ex-military assassin is quite literally deconstructed. This fic has an above-average impact with a total of 41 comments across the websphere: four of these, however, are negative, and one was the double-edged statement, ‘Not going to forgive you for this one. Wow’ (Rhyolight 2015). I initially read this as negative, but as dhampir72 reminded me in personal correspondence, expressions like this in a fandom context can also be read as
praise for the author's skill in manipulating the reader's emotions. As noted in the introduction, the legitimisation paradox is working inversely at this point, for the deconstruction of the lone-assassin position has some backlash when it entails the destruction of John's character. Ascription of qualities that de-legitimate his character meet resistance within the discourse.

Yet, fandom is often a little more reflexive and playful concerning the military or action-man construction than canon. The acronym BAMF, common internet parlance, introduces a playful note due to its invocation of slang and expletives. DancingGrimm's *The Acronym* plays explicitly with these meanings: in this fic, John is confused about the meaning of 'bamf':

“The Bee Ay Em Eff. Hm, that’s a new one on me. Do you know what it means, Sherlock?” John might not know what it means, but there are many little ways in which he proves the acronym suits him (DancingGrimm 2012).

Some of these are comic (‘Big Assed Manipulative Fiend’ depicts him tactically manipulating Mycroft via text message) but the final two resolve the fic—and the construction of John—in a medical/military position affirming both fandom and John's hegemonic position regarding masculinity. These are headed ‘Ballistic Accuracy Means Fun’ and ‘Being a Medical Fighter’. Being a Medical Fighter, indeed, is a prominent aspect of fandom's (re)construction of John, retaining both the active body and the middle-class respectability of that position.

Sherlock, meanwhile, is typically constructed as more aristocratic than he is in canon, positioned in grand houses and as the son of landed gentry. In *electricpirate*'s *Multiply*, John observes that

Sherlock had been resplendent [in his family home], among all this subdued and understated grandeur. The Holmes family had surrounded themselves with the kind of splendour that spoke to being properly, anciently, filthily rich. They were not flashy, by and large, preferring to use their wealth to buy things of taste rather than opulence. Sherlock, who always seemed too cramped and folded up into awkward shapes in their small, cluttered flat in London, had stretched himself out and strode through these ridiculously beautiful halls with a magnificence that John had not been able to define or quantify (2012).

Sherlock’s natural position seems to be that of an aristocrat, whereas John is frequently ill-at ease in such surroundings, fearing the expensive crockery will ‘break under his clumsy, Watsonian hands.’ Yet again, fandom is more reflexive
about class construction than canon is: in hamishholmess’ *Self-Conclusion*, these class positions collide. Sherlock is here an upper-class, gentleman-spy posted to the Middle East, and finds himself under John’s unwanted care after a ‘bout with drugs goes sour.’ Distancing himself from John, Sherlock observes the ‘sure sign[s] of manual labor and legwork’ in John’s hands, which ‘spoke to Watson doing what he must to earn his keep.’ Disgusted with Sherlock’s snobbery and ungratefulness, John reprimands him:

“I’m not sure what happened there, Mr. Holmes, or what your life in London is like. But I can assure you, no one here will be impressed with what you call a battle scar. Choose your words carefully, especially among those that risk their lives every day for the things you so obviously take for granted” (hamishholmess 2014b).

Sherlock is taken aback, given that ‘normally when he went prima donna, the victims fell silent, or apologized, or retracted their previous statements.’ Confronted with the reality of his own privileged position, Sherlock apologises, and John responds, ‘Don’t apologize for who you are. Just remember not everyone can be like you, and we don’t deserve to be punished for that.’ The interconnection of class and the body are thus highlighted and deconstructed in ways elided in canon, clearly opening a new interpretative category of the kind Artieri suggests (2012, p. 463). Sherlock’s skin is flawless—bar his self-inflicted wounds—because he has never had to do the ‘manual labor and legwork’ John has.

*Self-conclusion* is quite well-received with 58 comments on A03, but the most popular fics are those which change Sherlock and John’s social position entirely, via fandom tropes of pregnancy, parenthood and/or their relationship with each other. The vast majority of fic coded was Sherlock/John slash. This could be explicit, involving sex scenes and the development of a relationship, or implicit, where interactions are similar to canon but queerbaiting is removed via tags or notes affirming a homosexual relationship between the characters. Homosociality slides much more easily into homosexuality than it does in canon. As I have argued elsewhere (Fathallah 2014), canon abides by the strictures of Western masculinity explored by Kosofsky Sedgewick (1985). Here, men are compelled and circumscribed by the necessity of the strong male–male bonds upon which patriarchy depends, and so must navigate and exorcize the spectres of homoeoticism. In fanfic, meanwhile, homoeroticism is constructed as the natural extension of homosociality, and frequently repositions the characters in a domestic sphere traditionally coded feminine.
For instance, the single most impactful fic coded was earlgreytea68’s *Nature and Nurture*, which gathered an astonishing 9693 comments across the discursive sphere, along with an assortment of fanart, translations into Spanish (x2), Italian and German. It is rated and reviewed on Goodreads, a site associated with published books, thus imbuing it with cultural capital and a suggestion of an author-function (cf. Foucault 1991, p. 113). Moreover, the movement of well-received fic to such popular review sites indicate that fandom’s discursive transformations are beginning to expand beyond fan sites. In this story, Sherlock and John must raise Sherlock’s child-clone after rescuing him from a government laboratory. As the author’s note explains,

What happened was that hobbitts on Tumblr wrote the little comic that you can see here (http://earlgreytea68.tumblr.com/post/45650331985/ohmybenedict-all-misty-eyed-hobbitts-i), and my heart broke into seven million pieces. But I’ve already written a young Sherlock fic, so I felt I’d gone over that ground. “Too bad,” I thought, “that I can’t make it Sherlock’s son, but I really can’t see Sherlock having a kid” (earlgreytea68 2014).

Repositioning Sherlock as a parent, then, produced internal resistance, as inappropriate or un-authorized by canon. The clone was earlgreytea’s solution. Sherlock’s repositioning is not easy for him, assuming at first it will be easy to raise the child as ‘he is me,’ but soon running into trouble when the infant proves unready to immediately join him in science experiments. He learns, though, both to love the child as its own person and eventually to love John as a partner. Their repositioning as a couple begins as a matter of practicality:

“Put John’s name on the birth certificate,” said Sherlock, whirling from the window. “In the space for ‘mother’.”
“But John is not Oliver’s mother.”
“Excellently deduced, Mycroft. But I want him on the birth certificate, and there’s nowhere else to put him. If something happens to me, I don’t want there to be any question as to who should be taking care of Oliver (Ibid.).

The situation develops into the mutual realization that they are, already, in love, and a couple in all but name. They get married with the vows: “I give you this ring as a sign that you are my favorite person on the planet,” [said Sherlock] and “I give you this ring as a sign that you, too, at all times and in all ways, are my favorite person on the planet [said John] [...] “And not at all anything like a high-functioning sociopath.” (Ibid.). The denial of
Sherlock as sociopath is a fandom trope, and in this story is explained as a convenient diagnosis sought by his uncaring parents. Sherlock learns to love his clone-son as he was never loved, protecting him from the scientists who wish to reclaim him for their experiment. Feminine-coded emotion and the family network replaces the scientific-rational positioning of the detective.

This is the gist of most parentfics, though it is accomplished with difficulty: fics that demonstrate a learning curve and process to the repositioning of Sherlock and John are much better received than those that simply place him in the domestic sphere. KeelieThompson1’s very popular series of novel-length fics concerning John’s niece, Ava Watson, is the most prominent example. In these stories, John is raising five-to-six-year-old Ava due to his sister’s alcoholism, and after returning from his apparent death, Sherlock must learn to become a part of their family. Interestingly, the first story is told from Ava’s perspective, thus decentring Sherlock from the pivotal role. Initially, Sherlock is confused and irritated by the child, then warms to her but is still incapable of a parental role. When John is injured:

Ava drew in a wobbly breath, suddenly terrified.
“Out,” Sherlock enunciated perfectly.
Ava couldn’t move.
“I said ‘get out.’” Sherlock didn’t raise his voice but rather clipped his words with even more harshness.
“Where’s Daddy?” she asked, her legs glued to the spot.
“Get out, get out, get out, get out,” Sherlock started to repeat over and over under his breath as if it were a mantra his life depended on.
“What’s?”
“Dying,” Sherlock suddenly roared. “Stupid man. Stupid idiotic man took that damned bullet because he couldn’t wait...the bloody minded fool.”
Everything stopped (KeelieThompson1, 2012).

Sherlock never becomes a conventional father figure, but, by the end of the series, he loves Ava unconditionally and is willing to put her and John before his work, his need for danger and his drug habit.

In these stories, Moriarty represents the threat and temptation for Sherlock to abandon the domestic sphere and return to his old, dangerous exciting life. The climax of that narrative thread is the rewriting of a key canonical scene, wherein Sherlock and Moriarty face off on the roof of the Reichenbach hospital. As I have previously written, Moriarty here confesses his deep disappointment that Sherlock, despite his delight in intelligence
and power games, has turned out to be on the side of hegemonic authority and conservative constructions of goodness:

Sherlock: I am you – prepared to do anything; prepared to burn; prepared to do what ordinary people won’t do. You want me to shake hands with you in hell? I shall not disappoint you.

(Jim shakes his head slowly.)


Sherlock (his voice becoming more ominous): Oh, I may be on the side of the angels, but don’t think for one second that I am one of them (TRF, transcribed by Ariane DeVere 2012).

Yet, both the narrative and Sherlock’s actions belie his words. His desire at this point is to survive and save his friends. As I discussed in an earlier article, ‘if [Sherlock] is not an angel, in this episode’s heroic arc, which viewers know through the work of citation will not really lead to his death, he is as close as makes no matter’ (Fathallah 2014, p. 497). Now compare KeelieThompson1’s citation and revision in her fic, wherein Moriarty kidnaps Ava and holds her hostage before Sherlock on the same roof:

[Sherlock] wanted his daughter in his arms.

Now.

Moriarty waited, and then started to rock ever so slightly [...] ‘You really are so terribly disappointing,” Moriarty said eventually, sounding genuinely sad. “I had half suspected that all this”—he waved the gun absent—“was nothing more than you trying to get a half-decent shag out of your pet.”

“She’s a child,” Sherlock started to plead.

“Don’t be so DULL!” (KeelieThompson1, 2013).

By ‘all this,’ Moriarty seems to reference the entire order of reproductive, networked, mutual domesticity to which Sherlock now belongs. As Edelman has demonstrated, ‘the child’ is a potent cultural symbol for this form of social order (2004). In the end, as one might expect, Ava is saved as John shoots Moriarty and after a great deal of trial and disruption including a prison sentence for John, the family is reunited. Moreover, by the conclusion of the last fic, Sherlock has been solidly repositioned within a network of people on whom he can depend and to whom he is accountable: not only John and Ava, but Mycroft, Mrs. Hudson, and to a lesser extent Lestrade. He is made to
answer for his poor decisions, such as drug use whilst responsible for a child, in a way he never really is canonically. The title of the last fic in this series, *Nest Among the Stars* (2013), contributes a strong metaphoric statement to the repositioning of Sherlock and John as productive, nurturing parents whose domestic sphere is surrounded by mutual support, yet distanced from the wider, destructive, dirty, dramatic world Moriarty represents.

Fics in which Sherlock adjusts to parenthood with difficulty are better received, but fics wherein he slots easily and naturally into parenthood are greater in number. John, however, is always constructed as an able mother or father who takes to parenthood naturally. The precedent is canonical, as the most recent episodes depict his delight at impending fatherhood, but this was the case even before Season 3 aired. This is possibly an extraction from the healer/doctor side of his canonical construction, combined with the influence of fandom tropes.

For instance, in *Wwwhat’s Every Path*, Sherlock’s reaction to John’s unplanned pregnancy announcement is: “I don’t want children, John.” (2013). John is not surprised, knowing that ‘The work [was] Sherlock’s priority, his first love,’ but reminds Sherlock that at one time he did not want a relationship either. Sherlock issues an ultimatum: John must give the baby up for adoption or Sherlock will leave him. Commenters find this difficult:

> I honestly don’t think I can continue to go threw [sic] with this if they go threw with the adoption (Marvaila 2013).

> I can’t see John wanting to get the baby adopted. I just can’t. He’ll change his mind, I know he will. I mean the woman on Corrie wanted to keep the baby she was a surrogate for, and it wasn’t biologically hers! Not that a soap can count for anything in real life but still! (Japonicastar 2013).

Notice how the conventions of a soap-opera, a genre coded feminine, are explicitly preferred to reposition the male characters as opposed to a depiction of Sherlock that other reviewers consider ‘realistic’ (anon. 5 2013). Yet, in the next statement, the commenter denies that a soap can ‘count for anything in real life.’ ‘Real life’ thus refers both to non-fictional human life, and to the lives of Sherlock and John in the story, placing them apart from and above soap conventions. However, they do indeed keep the child, apparently at the dictates of biology: John begins ‘nesting’, for ‘even though his brain knows that [he’s] not going to be bringing the baby home with you, his hormones are telling him to get ready for it.’ Once their daughter is born, John

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is overwhelmed, unable to give her up for adoption as planned. ‘John's body seemed entirely overcome by his biological instincts, entirely without control over what was happening to him, but seeming to have handed himself over to it’ (Wwwwat 2013). Biology forces him into a new social position, akin to mother. How far this applies to the father is initially dubious, as John admits that though ‘Sherlock’s [the child’s] Daddy, even if he doesn’t want to be, and even if he won’t be on her birth certificate [...] legally she’ll be alphaless baby Watson.’ However, Sherlock too is eventually repositioned by his own, alpha biology, becoming a protective if awkward father to their child.

Were this a male-female couple, it would read as a highly conservative story about the biological necessity of the traditional family structure (on conservative structures in mpreg, see Åström 2010). Indeed, there remains the question of how far pregnancy and domesticity is legitimated by its re-writing over the male body. On the other hand, the fact that these are male bodies necessarily imbues the fic with a transformative impulse: reproductive capacity and its attendant social positions are detached from the female body and attached to male ones. Yet consider this response:

In most mregs that I’ve read Sherlock is super-happy about the baby. And it’s nice, but we all know how often men just don’t want anything to do with pregnancy. So, it’ll be interesting to see how Sherlock changes his attitude *or maybe he doesn’t, and it could be interesting as well* towards the baby/John (Drago 2013).

The wording of this second statement is important, bringing the very category of ‘men’ into question. For if ‘men just don’t want anything to do with pregnancy,’ what is John, or the ‘baby/John’ hybrid in this story? We could read it as a re-attachment of the reproductive processes to the female body, rendering John in this story as essentially female. Yet, the canonical John, and all the John Watsons before him, remain inextricable from the new construction, so that female (?) reproductive John is always-already written over—and legitimated by—a prior construction of maleness.

Commenters on Every Path appreciate the difficulties Sherlock has in adjusting to his new position:

This is probably the most realistic portrayal of Sherlock’s reaction to an unplanned pregnancy. I’ve seen some where he is a complete ass about it and wants nothing to do with the child (at least in the start), and I’ve seen some where he makes a complete 180 almost immediately. Here he is logical about his reasons as to why he doesn’t want a child, yet he isn’t
demanding that John aborts it. He asks John what he wants instead and supports him as best as he can (anon. 4 2014).

By contrast, multiple short fics depicting Sherlock and John happily parenting a child without explanation receive zero comments. Abrupt or inexplicable alteration of position is apparently parodied in Benedictsexual's Little Surprise, which opens:

“Oh man!,” said John.
“What is it,” called Sherlock with passion.
“I think I’m pregnant!,” John squealed.
John heard a big crash as Sherlock bound into the room and swept him up in his arms.
“John,” Sherlock wispered [sic], “are you fo real?”
“yee, dis b da real deal” john replied in tears (Benedictsexual 2012).

The fic is not tagged parody or crack, and some commenters are unsure how to take it. Little Surprise receives ten negative reviews, which seem to take it seriously, such as ‘horrible every word’ (anon. 5, 2014) and ‘I don’t know if I should flame this fic or to laugh at it’s [sic] stupidity’ (anon. 6, 2014). The majority, however, construct it as parody, appropriating the mock ghetto-slang discourse to praise ‘Brah. That story waz like the bst ting i has evr red like that shit waz off de hook!’ (anon. 7, 2013). For some reviewers, the key statement positioning the fic as parody is the characters’ decision to name the baby ‘Mycrofta’, but the sending up of fandom tropes is also fairly obvious, such as the problematic element of Irene Adler:

“i’m leaving you sherlock! i heard you scream irene when we were having da intercourse!”
“No John I would never do not leave me john i love you!,” Sherlock began crying. “No one ever gonna love you more than i love you john that is true as science!
“irene said she was sherlocked!” :( 
“Damn it john! dat was 3 weeks ago! why you so upset still” (Ibid.)

Compare Sherlock’s appreciation of the new baby despite ‘it’ being ‘really covvered in stuff’ [sic]. Moreover, the fic concludes with a parenthesis ‘(Oh yeah...they got married [sic])’ that appears to mock abrupt or ill-plotted transitions into domestic life for the protagonists. Fandom’s interest, then, is
more in constructing the process of transformation than simply presenting it, sourcing both its authority and its transformative capacity in canon.

Alpha/beta/omega fics demonstrate a more radical transformation, initially of the body, but strong statements link the body to social position and consequences. A very popular formula sees Sherlock and/or John struggling against the social position his reproductive capacities would place him in, a narrative that is obviously coded as feminine. The most are very long, highly crafted and contain a good amount of world-building, resulting either in a narrative of social revolution centred on the bodies of Sherlock and John, or ‘personal adaptation and survival’ (BeautifulFiction 2015). The single most impactful A/B/O fic, The Gilded Cage, receives 3151 positive comments on A03, various fanart, and a translation into Chinese. This story is set ‘in a world where omegas are the property of the elite alphas, locked away and treasured by those wealthy enough to buy them’ (Ibid.). John and Sherlock flat-share as in canon, and John assumes that Sherlock is a fellow alpha due to his work and demeanour. The first hints that Sherlock is hiding something come from his emotional reaction to a botched surgery on a female omega trying to sell her reproductive organs:

Yes, how awful to have no choice in the matter. To be seen as merely a means of producing children and sold into a bond she had no desire to form [...] her only method of acquiring self-sufficiency would be to sell what society views as her primary asset’. He looked back at the surgical slice in her stomach. ‘She thought the risk was worth it, not only that of being caught, but that of losing her life as well’ (BeautifulFiction 2015).

Empathy is constructed via bodily connection, for Sherlock too is an omega. He is hiding from the abusive alpha he escaped from and has built an independent life outside the dictates of his class and gender. The nobility, to whom Sherlock belongs, are constructed as archaic and dictatorial in their gender politics, whilst most of the world no longer views biology as destiny: ‘Times changed but the elite didn’t’ (Ibid.). Yet, he cannot kill or allow John to kill his bondmate, because an alpha’s death triggers a paralysing neurochemical reaction akin to grief in a bonded omega regardless of his or her feelings towards the bondmate. When his bondmate does die, Sherlock must face this:

He had believed those omegas who buckled beneath the strain, pining for people they’d once proclaimed to hate, were weak-willed—the products of a society that sought to keep them in their place.
For the first time, a glimmer of understanding was within his reach. This was not the bright agony of heartbreak. It was an insidious chill, as if something were digging out his insides and leaving him with a black hole at his core around which he would collapse (*Ibid*.).

Note the intricate connection of the body to social position. Biology does have dictates, shaping characters’ options and social connections. As one would expect, Sherlock and John end up in a healthy bonded relationship; however, Sherlock maintains his identity and his work. Reviewers take the gender politics of the work seriously and reinforce its statements:

This fic has reminded me what good science fiction is supposed to be like; what its purpose is: giving writers the ability to talk about real-world problems by pretending they’re fictional (SheKillsCacti 2014).

Here we have an indication of fanfiction’s transformative capacity in altering categories of interpretation in the broader social realm (cf. Artieri 2012, p. 463). SheKillsCacti positions herself as a reader, here, rather than specifically a fan, demonstrating fanfic’s capacity to impact discursive formations in the same way traditionally published texts can. To a large extent, A/B/O verse explores what would happen if canon characters coded male were placed in a position historically determined as ‘female’, even while questioning what gender is: presentation? Biology? Reproductive capacity?

Cuddlefish’s *Organic Chemistry* constructs a society where omegas are less valued, less protected and more vulnerable than other genders, and uses Sherlock’s omega body as the catalyst for a social revolution. As his gender does not manifest, a phenomenon constructed as equivalent to puberty, until relatively late, Sherlock initially shares a social prejudice against omegas:

While I didn’t know any omegas personally at the time, I still found many of their stereotypical attributes objectionable. The thing I hated most about them was their affected infantile behaviour. How on earth could omegas expect to be taken seriously—let alone be granted the same political rights enjoyed by everyone else in Britain – if they acted like toddlers all the time? (cuddlefish 2014a).

When his gender manifests he is gang-raped at university, and advised by an unsympathetic nurse that he brought the attack on himself and there is no
point tarnishing anyone’s name in public by trying to secure a conviction. Even Mycroft, who is sympathetic and assists Sherlock in creating a new life disguised as a beta, admits there is no point taking the attack to court. In this world, omegas hold the legal position of children, and are expected to be virtuous, chaste, nurturing and submissive to their alphas. This is the state of affairs in Britain: in Cuba, from whence Mycroft secretly recruits a doctor to perform an illegal abortion on Sherlock, omegas have full legal personhood with all attendant rights and responsibilities. Cuddlefish explains in a comment:

The reason I went with Cuba and the Eastern European countries as the sole bastions of omega equality in the omegaverse is because of their socialist pasts (or present, in the case of Cuba) in our own world. In other words, I’m equating the omega rights movement with Marxism […]. In most states, the government, laws and, ideology continued to favour alphas, and they saw the omega rights movement as a huge threat to the status quo, contributing to the outbreak of a Cold War, just like in our universe (2014b).

Gender, then, is explicitly constructed as a social position over and above a biological one. Fascinatingly, in this universe, Moriarty is the head of an omega terrorist network intent on defeating the gender-based social order. Compare his position in KeelieThompson’s work, as the opposing threat to child-focused social order. In this rewrite of the confrontation scene, Moriarty observes that Sherlock is ‘on the side of the alphas’ (cuddlefish 2014a, emphasis mine).

“Think about it, doofus! All the laws that you try to uphold? Those were all made by alphas to protect their own interests. Not yours, not mine, not any omega’s. The British legal system doesn’t even recognize us omegas as persons, and yet you risk your life in its defence” (Ibid.).

This citation and transformation of canon aligns the gender-based, reproductive social order with the normative politics of law and order Moriarty accuses Sherlock of upholding in canon. Gender is a matter of social structure rather than inherent or natural. When Sherlock asks how a criminal network benefits omegas, Moriarty responds that

“It benefits at least one omega: me. And plenty more besides. You see, Sherlock, there are a lot of smart but underappreciated omegas in the world. What they can’t achieve in the law-abiding world, I give them
a chance to attain working for me. I’m probably one of the only equal-opportunity multinational firms in Europe.”

“A criminal empire run by omegas,” I began.

“For omegas.” Jim finished. “So, you see, Sherlock. That’s why you have to die. You’re a traitor to your gender. You use your cleverness to defend a system that oppresses your fellow omegas” (Ibid.).

Thus, not only does Organic Chemistry contribute strong statements that very explicitly connect bodies to social positions, it positions Moriarty less as a purely-destructive psychopath than the potential visionary of a new world order. It is also the single most impactful a/b/o fic in the discursive formation, with 1368 comments on A03, none of which are negative. Its statements are consolidated with repeated terms of praise and commendation (Bhabha 1994; Hodges 2011): ‘brilliant’ (ImUnaware 2014; HarukoWitch 2014; Tosinadekunle 2015); ‘amazing’ (MyRockInAllThings 2014; EvilConcubine 2014; Marcy09 2014); and ‘wonderful’ (Giveusakiss4132 2015; Marlon 2014). Moreover, though Jim is killed and his network destroyed, Sherlock’s omega body in combination with Mycroft’s increasing position of power in the British government becomes the catalyst by which a series of slow social transformations are enacted. It is always omega bodies that bring change, even if the change must be gradual reformation rather than violent revolution.

This trope is explored most explicitly in Lintilla’s Dilaudid (2012a). Here John is the omega undercover, Moriarty is once again an omega terrorist, and Mycroft works misguided with an alpha supremacist group at the top levels of government. Sherlock is an alpha with an academic interest in omegas. In this story, betas are the child-bearers, rendering the biological role of the omega uncertain. As the author discusses:

Most a/b/o stories do have mpreg but I decided to exclude it and explore the consequences of a biological absurdity and the social imbalance it would cause. I also wanted to show the arbitrary nature of gender and how it’s a societal construct and not the biological fact that people think it is (Lintilla 2012b).

Unlike most a/b/o stories, social discrimination against omegas is grounded in their apparent lack of a reproductive function in a social order organized around reproduction (rather as it operates in our world against women who cannot or will not become pregnant). Once his gender is accidentally revealed, John finds himself the unwilling face of an omega equality movement. The connection between bodies and position is solidified in Mycroft’s
observation of a public kiss: “Congratulations Dr. Watson, your tongue has now officially caused a public riot” (2012a).

Fandom, then, dramatically repositions Sherlock and John primarily via the alteration of the male body and the variety of social positions expected of men. When it consolidates their canonical positioning, especially militarism in John’s case, the statements are inflected with both appreciation and reservation. Intertextually influenced by the fandom trope of parenthood, it frequently explores how the lone-hero is disrupted by the presence of children. Finally, it has been heavily influenced by the fannish popularity of mpreg and a/b/o fic, which demonstrate the inextricability of the gendered body from social position, and the difficulties attendant upon that linkage. In some ways, these works are radically transformative; yet, their transformative capacity is still dependent on the author-ized male body, the canonical figures of Holmes and Watson and the Moftiss-authored versions of John and Sherlock. It is the author-ized TV scripts which are adapted and rewritten in crucial scenes, and the White male bodies of the characters which grant cultural legitimacy to feminine-coded stories of pregnancy and gender. We will now discuss the last branch of the discursive formation, which I call ‘Place’, before summing up the transformative work fanfic has done on the discourse of masculinity in *Sherlock*.

**Place**

Fanfic is generally less invested in place than canon, and certainly less invested in London. Perhaps this reflects its global, dispersed authorship as opposed to the BBC’s centralized one; perhaps it is a product of the fact that fans are typically more interested in character. Only one fic took place as its subject matter: this was *Incarnations of London*, a metaphorical short in the style of a fairytale. In this fic,

> [t]here once was a city that called itself London. It was a city so animated and effervescent, a study in contradictions, endless paradoxes of the most esteemed beauty and the harshest crudeness coexisting on historical ground. Tormented by the need to truly live, London devised a plan to make itself a body. However, due to its inborn dichotomy of character and temper, London could not take form as one man. So it became two men, instead (TheBookshelfDweller 2013).

Of course, these men are John and Sherlock. John is ‘London’s Daytime man’, disguising ‘hidden treasures that lay below the obvious [...] His scarred skin,
testimonial of a past filled with turmoil and bloodshed, was hidden under present layers—a contemporary polish.' Whereas canon elides the whole history of British colonial violence, this fic constructs a Daytime London that upon the man’s return from foreign lands, ‘delivered a sun more intense than any that ever shone over the city, a foreign light stolen from Middle-eastern planes.’ Granted, the adventurer who returns bringing bounty to native England is an Orientalist trope, but the verb choice ‘stolen’ adds a minor statement of criticism to the construction. Sherlock, meanwhile is ‘Night-time London’, which may be

captivating like London’s countless lights glimmering brilliantly in the witching hour, but he wasn’t the lights. Rather, he was the dangers lurking between two lampposts, in the dim contours of street corners, dark back alleys and umbra under overpass arches. He was utterly uncensored, much like the city in its latest hours, when arms were pricked, punctured to allow anti-gravity matter into the heavy blood, as their owners spread chemically-induced wings to flee far away from park benches [...] In him London amassed its macabre love for all things morbid (Ibid.).

*Incarnations* goes some way to restoring the side of London canon overlooks then, the poverty and drug abuse and crime against the glossy postmodern structures and grand Victorian heritage, rendering the figure of Sherlock, dirtied and breached by needles, inextricable from that construction. Compare this extract from *Multiply*, wherein Sherlock appreciated

the whirling dervish that is Westminster at lunch hour [...] the turmoil of people and cars and busses and tourists and cameras and dogs and drunks and shouting and laughter and crying—if this spinning, dazzling, grinding, ghastly mess of a city is somehow able to make the calamitous tumult of his restless mind more bearable (*Multiply,* electricpirate 2012).

As Sherlock’s mind is less stable, more penetrable than in canon, so is the place he emblematizes. Yet, as I have argued, a thorough discursive analysis, particularly regarding discourses in flux, must bear in mind the comparative impact and prominence statements within a discursive formation rather than simply nothing that they exist. *Incarnations* makes only minor impact on the discursive formation, with 5 comments on Ff.net and 10 on LJ. Moreover, it is a rarity. Though not quite rejected, these statements
are marginalized by internal mechanisms in the form of fanfic conventions cultures, which privilege long, tightly-plotted narrative, character-focused story arcs over what is effectively a prose-poem. Multiply fits all those criteria, and the writing is of professional standard, thus it has much greater impact (590 comments on Ao3, all positive). In that story, however, setting is but one element in a novel-length character drama.

We might argue that the convention for character-focused novels has a reductive effect on the constructions of place. But a different fan convention has productive effect: namely, the interest in backstory. When we meet John in the BBC canon, he has shortly returned from military service in Afghanistan. Fandom’s interest in his military career produces a wealth of stories set in the Middle East. Orientalist conventions from canon are solidified—but they are also altered and undercut. Fandom also self-reflexively critiques its own implication in the discursive construction of the Middle East, as in Whiffling10’s Tumblr post, ‘A Note on Afghanistan and Iraq in Sherlock fics’:

The few fic depictions of Iraq I have read harp on the oppressive heat and barren landscape.* While I understand that characters may perceive Afghanistan and Iraq-at-war as miserable places to be, I would like to remind both authors and readers that Afghanistan and Iraq are countries that a lot of people love and call home. [...] Listening to white people talk about how wretched these places are when their presence is a huge part of what makes them difficult countries to live in is grating at best, and usually just marches straight into the realm of ‘extremely offensive’. [...] There is a way to talk about the difficulties of being a soldier without buying in to the (racist) narrative (which helped justify the wars in the first place) positing Afghanistan and Iraq as wastelands of violence and ugly otherness (Whiffling10 2014).

Whiffling10 urges readers to read Orientalism, and familiarize themselves with the broader discursive construction of the Middle East in which most of us are implicated. As I observed above, fan discourse the connections between gender and social position far more critically and astutely than it does race, and here again we have an indication of both the implication of fandom in broader interpretative categories, including scholastic ones, and its potential to change them. There is a striking tendency in fanfic to solidify the construction of not-Britain as danger, as a danger to British men and the kinds of masculinity they represent. John or Sherlock on revenge missions abroad, typically
after the other's death, tend to be infected Heart-of-Darkness style with
the darkness, dirt and disease of the other place:

Havana was a near miss, but [assassin John] killed two more people and
threatened the structural integrity of the government. He skipped Brazil
and went straight to Japan, where he played the bumbling tourist by day
and at night made deals with the yakuza.

[....] John went mad in Gibraltar; later he ascribed it to a combination of fever
and antimalarials and over two years of service that hadn't been about
Queen or country for a long, long time (Mad_Maudlin 2010).

Certainly, these statements alter the construction of the White male
mind—as penetrable as the body, here—but as they do so they solidify
the construction of England as a harbour at the centre of the dangerous
world. Some statements pull against this: when John returns to London
in hamishholmess's Afghanistan or Iraq?, he is overcome with aliena-
tion, wondering how 'home' could 'feel foreign' and acknowledging his
leave as 'a holiday from real'. Afghanistan is constructed as the Real.
Yet, in the same fic he judges Kandahar a 'life-sucking city' where 'the
dust shifted with every footstep. Everything was covered in it; the filthy
powder was inescapable' (2014a). Meanwhile in Self-Conclusion, Sherlock
at first considers his new surroundings through disgusted eyes, finding
that 'Kandahar was miserable. Dusty, khaki-colored misery,' and resolving
that 'as soon as he returned to London, he would take a hot shower for
days' (2014b). Interestingly, though, Self-Conclusion demonstrates that
the Orientalist gaze is as much a product of Sherlock's class position as
his ethnicity:

The hygiene here in Kandahar was shameful; how the soldiers endured
it, he had no idea. Although, they were a different class of human alto-
tgether—submissive to the orders of those above them. They would never
care about having six minutes of lukewarm water and a mutual bar of
soap. But Sherlock's skin broke out in gooseflesh at the thought. He missed
Baker Street. Desperately.
The 'different class of human' he perceives in working Englishmen blend
easily and apparently naturally into the dirty landscape. Moreover, John
is part of that landscape:
“You can never see the stars like this in London.” John's voice was gentle
and lulling.
“If this is the only good thing about this god-forsaken place, I can’t say it’s worth it.”

John sighed. It was a forgiving sound, as though he disagreed but could maybe, possibly, see why you felt that way. Sherlock sensed that this was Captain Watson’s home (2014b).

On one hand, the ability of the Englishman to blend in and naturalize anywhere is a key to his constructed position at the centre of the world; on the other, Sherlock senses here that John would not be at home in England, that he has no family and no particular place to go back to. This throws into question the construction of what nationality is, whether essential as in most of the Sherlock Holmes canon, or whether it is possible to find and recreate a nationality in a new place. Sherlock’s class also prompts a Corporal to inform him ‘You’re in the wrong place’ in Fivepips’s Combined Operations. In this World War II era story, service in France provides an opportunity for Sherlock and John to develop a relationship:

“People don’t care if I’m queer here,” [said John]. They only care about killing Jerries. I thought they’d be more outspoken against people like us but its better here than back home. I don’t have to hide. When I go home, I will” (Fivepips 2014).

Statements like these connect social position and time to an understanding of place—by repositioning Sherlock and John in relation to each other (as queer lovers), their relationship to London is also changed. They are now peripheral, much more so in a 1940s setting than they would be in the present. Thus, ‘home’ and ‘England’ are reconstructed as less imperative, less integral to their characters.

A very popular fic contributes key statements to the construction of Afghanistan: abundantlyqueer’s Two Two One Bravo Baker. This fic receives 2549 comments on A03, which again consolidate its statements through much-repeated terms of affirmation like ‘fantastic’ (Hobocamp 2011; carreracaminos 2012; ellie_hell 2011), ‘incredible’ (nic 2011; strawberryhiddleslock 2015; jankjay 2015), and ‘wonderful’ (ErinClaire 2011; thinkpink20 2011; lnfc0218 2013), which solidify its position of importance. In Bravo Baker, Marine Commando John Watson is assigned to protect Sherlock Holmes as the detective investigates a series of war crimes in Afghanistan. Together, they uncover a conspiracy implicating Britain and America in arms deals and cover-up causing casualties on both sides. Once the depth
of the corruption comes to light, the British position in global politics is critiqued:

“What they have done—if it becomes known—will go far beyond stirring up public opposition to the war,” Mycroft says. “It would certainly bring down the current administration in the United States—and very probably the British government too—and force a complete change of military leadership.”

“The only chance of political survival would be to repudiate the war completely,” Sherlock says.

“Quite,” Mycroft smiles icily. “And I can’t allow that; we must have the war, I’m afraid. The Taliban tolerates poppy-growing because it funds resistance to the occupation. Without an occupying army, they’ll be a good deal less permissive. You can’t imagine what would happen if heroin became simply unobtainable in this country—or, perhaps you can” (abundantlyqueer 2013).

Ultimately, law and order must prevail in England at any cost; the ‘icy’ smile and contrast of possessive verb-phrase ‘must have’ with the connotations of ‘war’ position Mycroft as a villain here. The primacy of England is not overturned, but it is criticized. Meanwhile, whilst John and Sherlock assert they could ‘never live anywhere except London,’ it is the stimulus of the Afghan land-and-skyscape that open the possibilities of their relationship. Consider this passage:

The night sky is fractured by a river of light running almost vertically up from the horizon. There are more stars in that river than Sherlock could have ever imagined exist. Hundreds of thousands of them crowd together so closely that the darkness between them is obliterated, turned to glowing rose-violet instead of black. Great clouds of stars fume off from the central flow of the river, billowing outwards into the dark, and tens of thousands of lights sparkle all the way out to the far horizon. [...] The moon has set now. The night sky is broken open above them, and the light of the stars pours out of the fracture (Ibid.).

Certainly, the legitimization paradox is at work in the sense that the White men’s presence and the development of their relationship is the viewpoint here. But the imagery is far enough from the dusty khaki, dirt and human misery that informs John’s canonical flashbacks and the broader contemporary construction of the Middle East that we can
safely state transformative potentials being opened here. Notice also
that Sherlock does not read the sky. It does not offer up its meanings for
his consumption.

Compare Korengal Calling (Ghislainem70 2014), another fic concerning
military corruption in the Middle East. The Korengal Valley in north-east
Afghanistan was the scene of heavy conflict between American soldiers
and the Taliban in 2006–2009, and bears the real-world epithet ‘The Valley
of Death’. This statement is imported in the story along with the military
slogan ‘damn the valley’. Yet, the fic's construction of the Valley itself is
morally neutral and again interestingly unreadable:

The Korengal Valley is long and narrow, a 6-mile twisting serpent with
its head pointed toward the border of Pakistan.
The Korengal Valley has been the safe harbour of smugglers and resist-
ance fighters from time immemorial. Remote, spectacularly rugged, so
mountainous that less than ten percent of its inhabitants live on the
fertile valley floor. Impossibly tall and ancient pines, formerly the source
of now-illicit timber trade, made jagged fingers at the crest of the endless
ridgelines (Ghislainem70 2014).

The noun phrase ‘smugglers and resistance fighters’ is a morally
equivocal statement, pairing positive and negative connotations either
side of a neutral conjunction, whilst the surface impression of the val-
ley is primarily one of beauty. Moreover, for the first time, Sherlock
struggles here with language. His grasp of ‘Afghan language was very
rudimentary,’ and the polyglot composition of the resistance groups
baffles his interpretative abilities. Sherlock is not the master-reader of
the Middle East the way he is of London, unlike the gentleman-scholar
of Orientalist fantasy. This fic is less impactful, with 55 comments, but
works in conjunction with Bravo Baker to destabilize the position of the
master-Orientalist.

In fact, what fandom reconfigures more dramatically than constructions
of the Other/Orient, is the readability of space around Sherlock, rendering
his world magical or supernatural. Copy That contributes strong statements.
Of his unwanted ability to shape-shift, John observes:

“But it’s magic.”
If there is a scientific explanation he'll grab it with both hands because
otherwise...otherwise his brain might just explode. Or Sherlock's. And
no one wants that.
Sherlock look like he’s trying to skin John with his eyes. “Yes, John. Against my better judgment and every law of physics, it’s magic.” He spits the word out, then buries his face in his hands, and all but groans (maybeMalapert 2012).

He is forced to reconfigure his conception of the world around him, and the two seek answers where the problem began, in Afghanistan. Here John ‘copies’ a local woman to consult a local witch, and while ‘the burka is making it harder to read her face [...] the woman (the witch) seems contemptuous—of him.’ Having given him his answer she commands: “Now get out; get out and stop fooling around with my sister’s body!” In other words, she read him, the intruder in her country. As the author expressed it to me in personal correspondence, she found it important that somebody question John’s appropriation of a Muslim female body:

The copying here was at once a form of appropriation (worse because it wasn’t ‘just’ clothes and cultural symbols) and also of violation of the privacy of a person, and the hierarchy of power was adding a lot of weight to the whole thing (maybeMalapert 2015).

Admittedly, this is John not Sherlock: I did not find any instances of Sherlock being read by Arabs. But again, these statements de-centre the White man from his reader-role. In these altered worlds, Sherlock and John must be more open to other forms of knowledge, knowledge usually constructed as feminine, be it the witch’s traditional learning or Mrs. Hudson’s babysitting expertise when, after ‘magic came into the world’ (Tawabids 2012) with no preamble, John becomes able to bear children. In the a/b/o verse, the world is often less readable than scent-able: in The Gilded Cage ‘the stale fragrance of a lie made Sherlock’s nose itch’ (BeautifulFiction 2015), and people, their genders and positions are recognisable by scent. Moreover, scents can be disguised: John fools Sherlock in Dilaudid and other surprise-reveal fics via the use of a hormone suppressant.

In summary, then, fandom does consolidate to some extent the Orientalist tropes concerning other places, but it is more reflexive and self-critical about that construction than canon is. London is still the centre of the world: apparently that governing statement cannot be undermined—but it is a dirtier, messier and more chaotic London than the London of canon. Moreover, fanfic’s convention of intertextuality, importing statements from other like genres the fairytale, supernatural fiction, comedy or the a/b/o verse, render Sherlock and John’s world much less rationally readable than
in canon. Here, magic can confound Sherlock's eyes; scents can deceive his nose. Obviously, this has implications for the construction of mind. In fact, the most striking transformation fandom has enacted is the explicit link and mutual reinforcement between the branches of the discursive formation. Social position and body are mutually dependent. Body and mind are inextricable. Place and social position interconnect, as do place and mind. The fact that canon elides all this naturalizes the central position of the straight White man at the centre of the world. Fandom's statements de-naturalize it, drawing critical attention to its construction.

In conclusion, then, *Sherlock* fandom's transformative accomplishment has been to radically de-naturalize the position of the White male genius at the centre of the world. Body, mind, position and place are shown to be strongly implicated in each other, via the workings of hormones, illness, reproductive capacity, class, wealth and educational opportunity. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that all this transformative work depends on and is legitimated by citation of a very hegemonic model of masculinity. Whiteness remains a governing statement, indeed the only governing statement to indisputably survive fandom's transformations. I suggest that this is due to both the visual source of the fic and the cultural invisibility of Whiteness as opposed to the raced body (Dyer 1997). Fandom does a much better job de-naturalizing the authority of maleness than it does Whiteness. Finally, we should bear in mind that internal regulation mechanisms seem to guard against excess, particularly with regard to the body and the mind's mastery of it: the characters cannot become too animal, too uncontrolled, too leaky, without significant backlash.

More explicitly, there is also ritual gesture legitimating the fanfic by reference to the authorial source text:

> Are you the secret love child of Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat? Because you are torturing my feeelssss with this.... (anon. 7 2012).

> Disclaimer: The characters in this story belong to Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss in their current incarnation (Wuerth 2013).

> Ugh, your use of spectacular cliffhangers rivals even the Mofftiss’s (cassiem9009 2014).

Though far from ubiquitous, the spread of these paratextual statements across the sites frame the fan's work as legitimate, praiseworthy, but secondary to and dependent upon the canonical text. Compare the reservations
about Sherlock and John being ‘out of character,’ suggesting that their ‘character’ is pre-set by the originating author. The author figure here is firmly ‘the Moftiss’—Conan Doyle is scarcely mentioned—but the legitimation paradox revolves more consistently around the idea of fanfic as a genre versus culturally legitimate authorship. A reviewer praises *The Gilded Cage*:

I second and third my co fan boyz/gurlz in that you elevate the fanfic genre to the realm of great literary fiction. I enjoy several other archive authors who achieve this in their own might—most are found in your bookmarks—and the lot of you comprise a tiny cohort (sanctuary 2014).

The writer is credited with ‘authorship’ and ‘great literary fiction’ in her own right here—yet, in doing so appears to have produce something which is not-quite-fanfic, which alters the very nature of fanfic, ‘elevat[ing] the genre.’ Can fanfic legitimate itself, on its own terms, under its own authority? Or is ‘authorship’, ‘authority’ and ‘legitimacy’ a red-herring here, something that ought to be questioned and deconstructed rather than aspired to? In the next chapter, these questions will be developed further, as we consider the discourse of ‘authority’ in *Game of Thrones* and its fic.