Holmes Abroad

Dutch Fans Interpret the Famous Detective

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Abstract — Discussing the interpretations of Dutch fans of *Sherlock*, I seek to understand how viewers make sense of the series in relation to other texts and what kind of literary competence they display in their reception. The study is based on seven in-depth interviews with Dutch fans of the series. Through this data, I explore how a local audience makes sense of the transmedial elements in the series. I elaborate upon the interviewees' understanding of the modern aspects of *Sherlock*, its characters, and its Englishness. Contemporary texts increasingly make use of transmediality to develop their narratives across various media platforms. This is often hailed as a strategy that companies use to construct a more active reader base that is prone to discuss its scattered fictional content. I add to this by showing how readers understand the narrative by "naturalizing" it through other texts and genres they are familiar with, aiming to shed light on individual ways of reading in an increasingly complex media landscape. Rather than explicitly relating the series to additional texts and instalments related to *Sherlock*, I argue that viewers explore the text through their implicit understanding of related genres, local and global popular texts, as well as their own experiences of what constitutes plausible character behavior.

Introduction

For international readers, Sherlock Holmes has always been considered the epitome of English culture. We picture him riding in a hansom cab through London, investigating dark alleys and tracing clues at a crime scene near the Thames. Throughout the years, pastiche writers have reworked the *Sherlock Holmes* stories by relating its main character to the cultural history of Britain and Europe, to other fictional texts such as gothic novels, or by introducing him to local detectives such as Arsène Lupin and scientists such as Freud (Den Boef 2005). The staff of the BBC series *Sherlock* (2010) explicitly

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revises this characterization and chooses to portray Holmes in a contemporary setting. Writer Mark Gattis stresses in the documentary *Unlocking Sherlock* (2010) that the idea of Sherlock Holmes "has become so much about the trappings, about the hansom cabs, about the costumes, the fog, Jack the Ripper will creep in here. It's become a strange maelstrom of stuff." In contrast, Mark Gattis and Steven Moffat give a fresh spin in a new time and setting.

Sherlock deconstructs some of the recognizable Sherlock Holmes features while at the same time echoing an awareness of the stories and the history of their reception. Reworking a character like Holmes, who is widely recognizable, is not an easy task. International readers often have their own ideas of Holmes as a figure that are not influenced by the novels but by popular and local culture. This contribution focuses on Dutch fans specifically and how they understand a foreign series as *Sherlock* and interpret its transmediality in practice. Dutch broadcasting and literature is influenced by Anglo-American media and, as a result, the image of Sherlock Holmes is constituted in relation to derivative works such as *House M.D.* (2004-). At the same time, local adaptations shape the image of the famous detective. Dutch television or movie versions of *Sherlock Holmes* are non-existent but the stories have been mediated into stage adaptations and pastiches (Den Boef 2005, 97–98). In the theater play *Hond van de Baskervilles* (2011), for instance, a few English actors gather in a mansion to re-enact *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. By depicting these actors as English, rather than the well-known Dutch actors they are, the play explicitly categorizes Sherlock Holmes as the terrain of England's cultural heritage.

Dutch culture is a good example of how international viewers make sense of *Sherlock* because it has a different literary canon than Anglo-American countries and, at the same time, a local culture of detectives that influence the reading process. *Sherlock* has been broadcasted in Belgium (Canvas) and in the Netherlands (KRO) as part of their KRO detective evening. Unlike Germany and France, the Dutch networks showed the original version of the series with subtitles. Fans of *Sherlock* focus on this broadcasted version, on a downloaded version, or on the local or imported DVDs. Despite the accessibility of the series, there are no local fan communities of BBC's *Sherlock* for Dutch-speaking fans. Smaller discussion threads can be found on the forums of broadcasting communities. Fans also communicate about *Sherlock* in English-speaking fan communities. The drawback of this is that the audience is spread globally. Dutch fans find each other haphazardly by meeting other local fans on larger online boards (for example, *Bakerstreet Supperclub, baker-street.org.uk*) through each other's profiles, or on specific national threads. Some stumble upon fans in real life or recruit them by recommending the show.

This means that the Dutch fan culture of *Sherlock* is not one interpretive

community (Fish 1980) but rather a label that helps analyze how a heterogeneous group of people, who identify themselves as fans, makes sense of the series. The interviewees' interpretations of *Sherlock* are substantiated by reader-response theories that underline how each singular reading is derived from the experiences of the individual reader. I argue that although Dutch culture is influenced by Anglo-American media texts, the Dutch fans still understand *Sherlock* as foreign content that fits in a particular popular culture. My findings show that fans explore a transmedia text not just by relating it to its source texts but also through their implicit understanding of related genres and local and global imagery.

Transmediality and Active Readers

Nowadays watching a television series is not just limited to a box set but increasingly takes place online and on other media as well. This phenomenon is discussed in this book as transmediality (Stein&Busse, this volume). Henry Jenkins (2006; see also December 12, 2006; *henryjenkins.org.*) describes the trend in *transmedia storytelling* as the spread and extension of narratives across various media platforms, including comics, movies, animations, and games. Corporations increasingly rework existing narratives and provide additional content that together create a larger story world or franchise. They substantiate existing story worlds by providing new plot lines, background information, or characters. Transmediality demands a particular kind of active viewership, because audiences who are familiar with all the texts of a franchise will understand the story better or feel motivated to discuss it amongst each other. When analyzing *Sherlock*, we can thus wonder how viewers understand and contextualize a text that is so deeply entrenched within network of other texts.

I discuss transmediality in *Sherlock* in two ways. First, I relate *Sherlock* to other texts and the source text, Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories; and second, I pay attention to the migration of form, namely the mimicking of aesthetic content of other texts. As an adaptation, *Sherlock* provides meaning to existing narratives by remediating the content and form of earlier texts, a process that is never a direct translation. As a modernisation, it also has original qualities because it remediates the existing versions of *Sherlock Holmes* more liberally. Specifically, I aim to find out whether explicit transmedial elements in *Sherlock* enable a more active reading as Jenkins (2006) implies when he argues that these function as cues that guide readers to related texts.

I draw from *reader-response theory* to analyze the role of the reader. This type of criticism focuses on how the interpretation of the reader constructs the text into a coherent whole: Hans Robert Jauss (1984) and Wolfgang Iser

(1974) highlight how readers *actualizes* texts; in other words, they give full meaning based on his expectations and experiences; responding to formalism, Stanley Fish (1980) develops ideas on how readers' interpretive strategies are developed within interpretive communities; and Jonathan Culler draws from French structuralism to nuance reader activity. In literary and media studies, reader-response theories have been the groundwork for many studies that analyze how (local) groups of readers and viewers are affected by texts (Radway 1987; Ang 1985).

To analyze fan reception, I use Culler's *Structuralist Poetics* (1975), in which he coins the concept *naturalization* to explain how readers make sense of the text, a strange and alien construct that has to be decoded. A reader actively gives meaning to a text in order to understand it at all. Each reading, in a sense, is singular and new, because a reader will interpret the text differently based on his or her expectations, which in turn are based on his or her cultural repertoire. Readers, for instance, naturalize a text by relating it to their own experiences, shared cultural knowledge, conventions of the medium or narrative, genres, and references to other texts (1975, 131–161).

Culler explains this interpretation process or naturalization through the idea of "*literary competence*. This means that the ability with which we interpret texts depends not only on our reading skills, but also on connecting the reading to meaningful discourses, such as the critical institute of literary studies (1975, 113–130). As a result, Culler sometimes refers to a reader who is especially competent, such as the critic, who is seen as more en par with these discourses and thus more knowledgeable. And yet, the concept is not limited to literary studies and the privileged critic: literary competence can be a fruitful way to understand the competences that fans display which are shaped by diverse repertoires and associations.

Here, literary competence implies that fans are also affected by their fan (and thus interpretive) communities. Different communities tend to privilege particular concepts and genres, which have emerged throughout the years. Importantly, fans have specific ways to read characters and plot lines (Pugh 2004). Often, characters are judged as if they were real, and fans describe them as "in character" or "out of character," depending on whether they believe them to behave as they would in the source text or not. In Monika Fludernik's reading of Culler's naturalization, she helpfully adds her own term *experientiality*, which she defines as "the quasi-mimetic evocation of 'real-life experience'" (1996, 12).

A narrative should not only be understood in a spacio-temporal sense but also as a construction of plausible characters and events. Fludernik argues that characters or *actants* have "consciousness," meaning that they behave in a certain manner with which readers can empathize. Experientiality relates to

transmediality in two ways. On the one hand, transmedial elements complicate characterization, because characters are also understood in the light of previous texts. On the other hand, transmedia texts assure that certain readings of characters will become more dominant because, as interpretations of these characters, they solidify certain readings.

Dutch Sherlock *Fans*

In order to explore the specific ways Dutch Sherlock Holmes fans responded to *Sherlock*, I recruited interviewees by posting at fan communities or SNS sites. All of the informants are in their twenties or thirties. I met two interviewees at a *Sherlock* board that I subscribed to for this study: *The Bakerstreet Supper Club*. Before submitting this article, I asked interviewees whether they wanted to be anonymous, published with their nickname, with their actual first names or a variation thereof. Though some had no strong opinion about this, others showed a strong preference for getting credit with their first name, especially since the information was not deemed sensitive. In the end, I decided to use first names in order to provide some anonymity, yet remain faithful to the interviewees' expressed wishes. In general, the interviews took at least an hour and were conducted either in real life or, because of logistics, through Skype or phone calls.

The selected fans all have different repertoires concerning *Sherlock* and *Sherlock Holmes*. One of the moderators, Sanne, is mostly interested in the series rather than the books, while another regular visitor, Margriet, emphasized her long-lasting passion for the books since she was a teenager. Astrid is passionate about the Holmes' stories and detective series in general but not active in fan communities. The others are not, or barely, familiar with the original books. Iris is active at some of the *Sherlock* fan communities and interested in BBC productions as such. Marissa, Shanna and Roderick are all active in fan communities but not those of *Sherlock*. Nonetheless, all three of them are enthusiastic about the series and familiar with different television and movie versions of *Sherlock Holmes*.

The selected set of interviewees thus reflects a strategic sampling of diverse audience members (Gray 2003, 100–101). The sample has a small scale, and while using small sets is not uncommon in ethnographical audience studies (see also Thomas 2002; Hermes 2004), the drawback is that the data is difficult to generalize and cannot be seen as fully representative for Dutch *Sherlock* fans. Still, the sample suffices for my purpose, which is to highlight the singularity of reading processes rather to make general claims about the local fandom of *Sherlock*.

A Modern Spin

When the interviewees are asked at the start of the interviews to generally describe what they like about the series, they independently mention its modernity as its most entertaining aspect. This is not so much as an emotional judgment as a statement that emphasizes the series' most apparent feature. Perhaps my occupation as a scholar or the educational setting influenced them to justify their pleasure in watching *Sherlock* through a more formal response. When pressed for more details regarding their investment in *Sherlock*'s modernity, the interviewees often elaborate the series' use of modern media such as iPhones and Internet sites. Roderick tells: "*Sherlock*'s most apparent feature is that it wants to be very modern. Examples of that are the camera tricks, the introduction as well as the texts that are being visualized."

The interviewees stress the importance of these digitally influenced visual features in their viewing pleasure. Both Astrid and Sanne describe that they were drawn to the series during an early shot in the first episode when all of the phones at the police station go off simultaneously during a presentation. We see Sherlock's text message hovering above them stating "wrong." "At that moment," Sanne tells me, "I was sold." In a comparison with the movie *Sherlock Holmes* (2009) and *House M.D.* (2004–)*,* Roderick describes how *Sherlock*'s visualization stands out yet fits within a larger detective tradition: "Modern means are used very well here to show what happens in the minds of these characters. That is entertaining but it is certainly not a must. In the past you could express this just as well in an explanation scene in which everyone is locked in the same room and the killer is revealed." Here, Roderick naturalizes *Sherlock*'s visuals by placing the series in a wider tradition and pointing out the explanatory function of *Sherlock*'s stylistic flourishes.

The use of technology is not seen as obtrusive but as a perfect fit with the Holmes format. Astrid and Roderick mention how technology makes the surveillance of all the parties, such as criminals and the police, more feasible. Others state that technology contributes to the investigation itself. Iris describes: "With Google at your disposal on your cell phone it is much more credible that you can find out all of these obscure facts you did not know ten minutes ago. It is much easier now to collect information that the older Sherlock Holmes had to know about on the spot." Margriet, when talking about Internet use in the series, is a bit concerned though. She feels most fans and viewers forget that Holmes is a character who employs many methods to gain and order knowledge, such as indexes and telegrams. Thereby she shows that *Sherlock* is a dominant interpretation of the original that already showed Holmes as technologically savvy and modern.

The methods of obtaining knowledge in *Sherlock* differ from the original

books, though (Hills, this volume). Roderick emphasizes that Holmes was a bit of a genius while Sherlock works differently. "Everything he knows is based on immediate knowledge and lab research and forensics." Iris describes that it has become more essential for Sherlock to combine facts in his deductions. "The art is not obtaining knowledge any more but bringing together disparate parts." Many interviewees emphasize that Sherlock selects information. Still, some, like Astrid, are concerned about what this entails for the Holmes formula. She states that the series features little actual deduction as such and that it bases itself on different types of knowledge too. The first episode, she tells, clearly shows Sherlock's deductive skills by bringing together facts; the second relies on finding codes while the third is linked by fast trials comparable to Agatha Christie's *The Big Four* (1927). Though the other interviewees think that *Sherlock* features a specific research method, Astrid discerns different styles that draw from a variety of crime series. Astrid

Other aspects of the Holmes formula still seem contemporary to the interviewees. Margriet is surprised by the ease with which some of the motives could be transferred to modern London. "They are still two guys living together in one apartment to be able to pay the rent, for instance." Margriet and several other interviewees mention the war with Afghanistan as being a one-to-one relation with the original texts that works especially well. Many interviewees mention certain references as being very clever like John's blog, Sherlock's *The Science of Deduction* site, and the use of nicotine patches. Iris and Marissa specifically mention the tie-in web sites as an interesting move by the BBC. These web sites are exemplary of transmedia storytelling (Jenkins 2006) that extends parts of a story to other media.

Some aspects of *Sherlock* lead to mixed interpretations, notably the titular character's occupation as a consulting detective. Astrid deems this a credible motive because freelancing is more plausible nowadays. She naturalizes this through other detective novels she reads that also feature private investigators. Roderick, however, is hindered in his viewing: "First, I find it less credible that in our present day the police would be so ignorant that they need to hire an external employee; and second, that they would accept him. I think that used to be more credible, when forensic science was not really a science yet. You can imagine that a genius, a savant, just shows up and tackles a case." The two readers' comments highlight a gap in naturalization, which can be explained because they both rely on different repertoires of detective fiction and ideas about labor in the past and today.

Though *Sherlock* is a modernization, some interviewees feel Victorian or historical motives still play a role in the setting and narrative. The evocation of, for instance, gothic themes is picked up by Roderick who also noticed this supernatural tension in Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes* (2009): "The good

thing about these cases is that you believe something supernatural is happening, not the kind of *Ghostbusters*' ectoplastic but more in the sense that these events are not possible at all. The cab driver in the first episode for instance creates this air he can make people kill themselves." Though the supposed supernatural is a theme in, for instance*, The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Roderick is not familiar with the original texts. By comparing adaptations of *Sherlock Holmes*, he naturalizes the gothic motives in *Sherlock*. Although the interviewees mention *Sherlock*'s modernity as its most apparent feature, it becomes clear that many elements they consider to be modern (such as technology) or traditional (such as gothic) are naturalized as characteristic of *Sherlock Holmes* texts.

Heroes, Sidekicks, and Villains

Sherlock Holmes fandom has gone through a long history in which fans discussed the characters as if they were real. This kind of "ironic belief" is underlined in the audience studies of Sherlockians by Saler (2003). Fans have long since tried to make sense of the stories by reconstructing facts and creating character biographies. This character engagement is in line with Fludernik's experientiality, and it was also my lead when I asked fans to give their opinion of the characters. In this section I shall show how they interpreted Sherlock, John, and Moriarty.

First, what becomes apparent at the start of the interviews is that the characterization of Sherlock is often addressed through his accessories and hobbies rather than his personality features. For the broader public, the standard image of Holmes is indeed that of a slender man wearing a travel coat, cap, and smoking a pipe. Most interviewees start by referring to that image and describe how the coat is a great mediation of the travel cape. Others draw on details from the books. Sherlock plays the violin, is bored when he is off his cases, and shoots at the wall. Though Holmes originally depended on cocaine to alleviate boredom, some feel the implied drug use in Sherlock is a weak reworking of this motive. Iris compares it to the Guy Ritchie movie when Holmes is caught red-handed by Watson after using opium. Similarly, Margriet draws comparisons with *The Case of the Silk Stocking* (2004) in which he uses cocaine in the rest room. The interviewees feel that part of the character is lost in the translation since the drug-addiction has always been a vital element of other Holmes texts.

Sherlock's personality in the series, as well as in the books, evokes very different opinions. Iris thinks Sherlock makes a "very strong, charming figure" while Marissa calls him a "dandy." Margriet, though, perceives Sherlock as being too rude compared to the books. She thinks the original Holmes is an

elegant, rational man who pays less attention to trivialities that do not fit in his world view. Marissa explicitly notes how BBC's Sherlock comes across as autistic through his social mistakes rather than purposely rude. She finds this is done quite cleverly. Indeed, the history of interpreting Holmes as autistic is a long one, albeit one that the interviewees seem less familiar with (Maher 1994).

The interviewees are quick to draw comparisons with other recent Holmes adaptations. Iris compares Sherlock to *House M.D.* and finds House "a much bigger bastard." Roderick thinks exactly the opposite. He sees BBC's Sherlock as annoying while he finds House charming: "He has a kind of natural authority." Those who allude to Robert Downey consider him to be scruffy like House but less mean and more eccentric. Marissa, though, thinks Downey echoes House a lot as "the type of grumpy older man, limp, badly shaven, that calls people off." She thinks this type of character has definitely put its stamp on Holmes, and she is glad *Sherlock* revolves less around a snarky character that enjoys outsmarting others.

Here, the appeal of Sherlock is often related to his age. Margriet finds this very true to the source text: "During the first case, they are not very old, so it makes sense." Iris and Shanna are very pleased with the youth of the characters and also think this helps to draw different audiences. Roderick naturalizes this differently. He argues that Sherlock's age affects the narrative and gives it a competitive edge: "It immediately changes Sherlock's dynamic, because the police get even more frustrated because he is young. If he is just a forty-five year old man, a genius, you assume he is right."

In their interpretations, the interviewees speak highly of John. Many of them stress they had few expectations of him when they tuned in for the series. Some explicitly evoke the popular image of Watson. Roderick describes: "Watson always seems a bit of a dumb, fat guy to me. Pretty incompetent too." Marissa, mainly drawing from *The Great Mouse Detective* (1986), stresses that aside from being the narrator, Watson often functions as comic relief. The interviewees praise John's skills in *Sherlock* that show him as a war veteran and doctor. "I used to always argue in favour of Watson to friends," Margriet tells me, "but they never bought it. Until now!" Many informants note that John functions as the everyday character one can identify with rather than a narrator or guide through whom Sherlock's thoughts are channelled. Both Iris and Astrid feel that John could have been even more "bad-ass" though, seeing as he is an ex-soldier. Meanwhile, Marissa naturalizes the war motif as trauma: "He is a sad character, someone who is at odds with himself."

Interviewees perceive the relation between Sherlock and John to be well portrayed in the series. Most interviewees highlight that they complement each other and three explicitly state Sherlock makes John's life less boring.

The intimate friendship with romantic aspects or *bromance* is often addressed. "It's friendship, but there are hints that there might be more," Shanna says. Marissa describes how they remind her of a married couple: "They have a house hold to run as well and make remarks about their groceries." As an outsider to fan communities, Astrid points out that she appreciates this homo-erotic subtext in the longer, literary tradition of romantic interpretations of Sherlock and John. Notably Sanne, Shanna and Marissa are active readers of Sherlock/John slash fan fiction: written stories by fans in which characters are portrayed as romantically or sexually involved. They also explain elements of the text, such as the awkward restaurant scene from "A Study in Pink," in relation to this genre. Not all interviewees are equally positive about slash though. Iris likes reading about the characters as friends while slash fan fiction makes the general stories she would like to read harder to find. "Welcome to online fandom," she states sarcastically.

Some fans also consider Sherlock to be asexual (see Coppa, this volume). Both Iris and Margriet are well aware that entire online communities flourish around this theme and also refer to discussion threads. Iris though, thinks that in the end asexual fan fiction is still about romance. Indeed, such stories tend to portray Sherlock according to the standard slash formula in which the character explores his sexuality (Jenkins 1992, 206–219). Historically, the detective as asexual seems to be a much older trope related to the view of detectives as loners or priest like figures proclaiming rationality (McCracken 1998, 60). The use of such cultural imagery in *Sherlock* echoes these older discourses and can be seen in the reception of the fans as well, where the asexual genre has been well-received.

A last characterization I inquired about is that of *Sherlock*'s Moriarty. In fan communities, the character raises mixed opinions and the interviewees underline this as well. All interviewees stress that they find he comes across as creepy or insane. Some feel that this could have been carried a bit further while others find the character over the top. Magriet and Astrid mention that they were very excited to find out what Moriarty was like. Margriet describes: "I just did not know what to expect. I was prepared to see him as a woman, even." Others also stress their theories that Mycroft, or in the third episode, John, would be Moriarty. Notably Astrid notes a slight disappointment about the character and prefers Ritchie's version as being more true to the book: "He is a kind of puppeteer who pulls the strings but you hardly ever see him." What she likes about *Sherlock*'s Moriarty is that he is on an equal level with Sherlock as a consulting criminal: "They are literally opposites." Marissa emphasizes the line between Moriarty and Sherlock is thin though: "By blurring his morals and social features, Sherlock is portrayed as a freak that approaches criminality and the evil master mind."

Though Moriarty does not reflect the features he has in Conan Doyle's original, as a professor and criminal of status, most interviewees do not see this as a problem. They experience Moriarty's revamped character as fascinating and, sometimes, as more authentic. Particularly Marissa thinks that *Sherlock*'s Moriarty is what a criminal mastermind should be like, as opposed to Disney's version of Moriarty, an insane "monster" who loses his rationality. Insanity, though, is the same standard by which *Sherlock*'s Moriarty is measured. Most interviewees describe the villain's age and normal appearance as standing in contrast to his creepy personality. Particularly Astrid, Margriet, and Iris stress that Moriarty comes across as normal and young. Interestingly, all three naturalize this by speculating about his history and argue that his normal appearance is an advantage in the criminal circuit.

Here, experientiality, as behavior befitting a character, differs widely based on what texts and what popular types the fans relate to. Those unfamiliar with the books sometimes imagine Moriarty differently based on a few images they have come across. "I am not sure who the classic Moriarty is," Roderick says, "but he is probably eccentric, that type of old treasure collector who has become a villain." Fans naturalize Moriarty's role as antagonist in *Sherlock* differently. Marissa considers Moriarty a traditional mastermind, a credible villain who "keeps his calm when he hunts you down, knowing he is going to win." In contrast to this, Roderick argues Moriarty is nothing like the clichéd rational villains from *James Bond* that plot elaborate schemes. He compares Moriarty to *The Dark Knight*'s version of The Joker (2008) in a sense that both villains are chaotic and unpredictable. This classification of characters according to fictional tropes is a particular literary competence that the interviewees display and that they use to justify their interpretations. Some of these tropes, such as the standard villain and the atypical one, exclude each other and highlight how fans naturalize this content differently.

Knitting Detectives

During the interviews, I also asked fans to reflect upon *Sherlock*'s English qualities. They often compare the BBC production to the global media industry at large. For starters, the series is perceived as an essentially British production in terms of writing. Many interviewees mention that *Sherlock* reminds them of a movie, in contrast to American series that stick to a 40-minute formula but have longer seasons. Iris explains that this results in a different storytelling format with more focus on plot within episodes but which still comprises its arcs within seasons. Since Dutch television also features other European series and networks, some draw comparisons with content that is

not Anglo-American or Dutch. Astrid compares *Sherlock* to *Tatort,* a German police series that also lasts one and a half hours but has a more specific format. "You can set your clock to when the body's found," she says.

In terms of writing, the interviewees distil different English elements from the text. Some mention the humorous undertones in *Sherlock* as specifically English. By relating *Being Human* and *Sherlock*, Marissa argues that BBC series focus better on smaller, everyday, domestic issues. Others draw comparisons in terms of casting and argue that British television is more prone to casting regular looking people that are not made up as overtly good looking as American actors. The authors, Steven Moffat and Mark Gattis, are also stressed in this discussion. Sanne and Iris think that the series has been written much like Moffat's (also BBC-produced) *Doctor Who* (2010-) episodes and compare *Sherlock* with the eleventh Doctor who appears to have some eccentricity in common with Sherlock.

As a detective series, the original English *Sherlock Holmes* books are considered by the Dutch interviewees as a hallmark of the genre that has influenced many other stories. *Sherlock*, as a later adaptation, is of course influenced by a wider tradition of detective and police series. Astrid, for instance, mentions that *Sherlock*'s third episode reminds her of Agatha Christie's *The Big Four* in which Poirot faces similar intellectual challenges as Sherlock. The interviewees often oppose *Sherlock*'s eccentric, younger titular character to the traditional English detective as depicted by characters as Morse and Miss Marple. The before-mentioned characters are considered to be textbook examples of English detectives, portrayed as older, single characters who indulge in leisure activities such as going to the pub or knitting. This is comparable to Thomas' research, which argued that fans understood *Inspector Morse* as an example of English culture because of, amongst others, the characterization of Morse as a bachelor in Oxford (2002, 31–58).

These traditional detectives often have two faces though. "Miss Marple for instance poses as a fluffy old lady, but she is anything but that," Margriet tells. Astrid alludes to Miss Marple as well as Patricia Wentworth's Miss Silver, a governess who, while knitting, cleverly distils knowledge from the witnesses. Roderick also mentions: "That is an entire genre in England, detective land. Older people that are knitting but meanwhile, they are fighting crime!" The methods that these traditional English detectives embody are juxtaposed with various *Sherlock Holmes* texts. While detectives like Miss Marple obtain knowledge by talking to people, Holmes relies on factual knowledge and forensics. Shanna notes that most detectives, including the American ones, appear to lean more on knowledge of people and finding out their dramatic life stories and motives. Others draw comparisons with American crime series that are more "official" or "bureaucratic" and "involve a lot of shooting" as opposed

to *Sherlock*'s atmosphere. These series are considered to appeal less to the intelligence and creativity that Holmes stands for.

Though Dutch people see Holmes as a very English character, at the same time interviewees' remarks often imply that there are detectives that they consider to be even more English. Likewise, some interviewees imply that they consider Holmes to be a traditional English detective but Sherlock not so much so, even though he is described as a typical inhabitant of modern London. They claim that Sherlock fits in with a stream of newer detective series featuring eccentric detectives and cops. Marissa for instance, compares him to the brilliant but flawed Monk (*Monk* 2002–2009), who has many compulsive disorders reminiscent of Sherlock's obsessions and possible autism. However, interviewees like Margriet also stress that the original Holmes was already that character: an eccentric, middle-aged, and authentic detective. The qualities that are in *Sherlock* and its "new" portrayal of the detective were in the old novels all along.

Lastly, interviewees compare the more urban, modern *Sherlock* with other traditional detective series in terms of location. Other detectives seem to take place in remote, local communities. Iris, Astrid, and Roderick refer to the closed environments of Agatha Christie that feature vacation houses, islands, and trains as scenes of the crime with only a few suspects. "*Midsomer Murders*," Margriet, for instance, mentions, "is much more local and small. It often starts with local clubs of bird watchers or so in which a body is found." Margriet also implies how traditionally English she finds *Midsomer Murders* based on its idyllic country sceneries. She emphasizes its foreign qualities and attraction. *Sherlock*, then, she finds much more urban. When asked to draw comparisons with their own local culture, most interviewees argue *Sherlock* has little in common with Dutch police series. Some mention *Baantjer*, a detective show that takes place in Amsterdam and explores the city and its canalside houses. This reminds them of *Sherlock* as both series mediate local culture well.

As the interviewees implicitly notice, *color locale* is an important feature in most detective fiction (Reijnders 2009). The murder changes an ordinary landscape into an active place of imagination, a story that slowly reveals itself. Gattis and Moffat also show an awareness of the setting when they describe London as an extra character in *Unlocking Sherlock* (2010). Many interviewees mention that views of London in *Sherlock* stand out as realistic. Iris and Shanna find this a very different portrayal of London than in American series, which often showcase touristic hallmarks like the Big Ben in the background. The viewers have mixed interpretations of what constitutes authentic space. Though some draw comparisons with *Baantjer* because it shows the hallmarks of Amsterdam, others value *Sherlock* exactly because it does not do this.

Conclusion

I have shown that viewers actively connect the transmedia text of *Sherlock* with the original texts and legacy of Sherlock Holmes. As it turns out, the application of Jonathan Culler's and Fludernik's theories has been fruitful to understand fan interpretations of *Sherlock*. The framework has complemented Jenkins' notion of transmedia storytelling as a literary mechanism that evokes reader's activity. However, the ways in which fans interpret the texts are not necessarily the active viewing that Jenkins describes since he assumes viewers familiarize themselves with other versions of the text and rely more on fan communities in this process. In contrast, my interviewees show that viewers have a wide range of repertoires that guide them in their readings.

Though transmedial elements form cues for audiences, they often bridge these with other experiences and fiction. Aside from alluding to other versions of *Sherlock Holmes*, viewers rely on their own experiences, knowledge of popular culture and literature. Furthermore, though interpretive communities shape the viewers' interpretations of the material, shared community interpretations do not appear to conclusively determine an individual viewer's interpretation of *Sherlock*. The interviewees engage with fan communities in various degrees. Some only use them as a resource while other active users clearly reflect on what they observe there, especially in relation to "hot topics" of fan discussion.

Though the interpretations of Dutch fans are influenced by their culture, this is not as much the case as I initially had presumed. The popular culture of Dutch people, after all, largely consists out of Anglo-American television series. These texts are what the interviewees often allude to when they judge *Sherlock*'s quality, characters, and setting. Still, we have seen that fans articulate local interpretations of foreign content, for example relying on elements that they consider to be defining for English detective series, or elaborating on London as a scene of production. Even without the Victorian entourage, Sherlock is still understood as an iconic English character.

I am grateful to all the fans who helped make this article possible.

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