Forensics as a Delay in Stories of Sherlock Holmes

“Although the Series is More Extendedly Delayed by Forensic Elements, the Difference is Not as Significant as Expected”.

Advanced Essay in English/
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Abstract

The relationship between the development of real life forensics and fiction’s use of it is a close one, and it offers excitement and pleasure to follow investigations and unravel mysteries, clearly, both in real life and fiction. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s fictional detective Sherlock Holmes has famously used advanced deductive methods to solve crimes since his first appearance in *A Study in Scarlet*. The recent explosion of forensic elements within fiction has not passed by unnoticed, raising the question of whether forensic delays are more extendedly used in more recent adaptations of Sherlock Holmes stories, due to the modern range of methods and techniques available. In this essay I show in a comparison of Doyle’s original works about the character Sherlock Holmes, to one of today’s television series; BBC’s *Sherlock*, that the recent adaptation is interrupted more frequently by forensic investigations, including modern forensic techniques and helpful equipment, which keeps the story from moving forward for a longer period of time, making it a delay. Furthermore, the comparison deals with adaptation theory and shows that the format in which the story is presented is decisive for the result. I conclude that forensic delays are used more extendedly in the contemporary television series *Sherlock*, due to a more generous range of methods available, but that measuring the extent of forensic delays generally favors the text format.

**Keywords:** Delay, Sherlock Holmes, Forensics, Development, Format
1. Introduction

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle first introduced the fictional character Sherlock Holmes in the late 1800s. The reader’s very first encounter with Holmes is in a hospital laboratory where a fellow doctor introduces him to a certain Dr. John Watson. Holmes has just made a new discovery in a “re-agent which is precipitated by hemoglobin, and by nothing else (16)”, which is a forensic breakthrough of that time. When Watson questions the practical use of this, Holmes immediately responds: “Why, man, it is the most practical medico-legal discovery for years. Don’t you see that it gives us an infallible test for blood stains (16)”.

Even at the first meeting with this famous protagonist, forensic science is introduced and accredited importance for detective work.

Detective fiction was already a popular genre at the time for Sherlock Holmes’ entrance in fiction, with characters such as Auguste Dupin by Edgar Allan Poe, yet Doyle managed to re-invent the genre with his use of modern forensics and Holmes’ high-end deductive skills. In addition, the peculiarity of the protagonist and his side-kick made for an entertaining read. Consequently, these stories became popular and there have been countless adaptations of Sherlock Holmes since then. Perhaps the most popular adaptation today is Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss’s television-series *Sherlock* on BBC One, 2010. Here Holmes is moved from his usual setting in Victorian London to a more contemporary London setting where he solves crimes with methods and technology that, similarly to the original, are the most advanced of their time, still accompanied by this side-kick Watson. Only a character that possesses a distinct caliber of recognition and popularity survives through time, and few characters manage to seamlessly adjust to a different setting in the way that Sherlock Holmes has.

At the end of the 19th century, which is when Doyle first introduced Holmes onto the literary scene, the use of forensic science was limited. Because of this, the range of and intricate details of Holmes’ investigations stand out as they were progressive for their time. Indeed, Staton O. Berg notes that contemporaries within the fields of police and forensic science “were willing to give credit to Sherlock Holmes both as a teacher of scientific investigative methods as well as a germinator of the ideas they later fostered into being”
Berg’s implication that Holmes has helped to inspire the development of modern investigative methods is a testament to the novelty of Holmes’ methods, and the relevance of Holmes as a character.

Nowadays, the use of forensic science in detective fiction is a natural component. On the list of recent detective best sellers which focuses on forensics, we find book titles such as *Bones don’t Lie* (Melinda Leigh, 2018), *The Victims’ Club* (Jeffery Deaver, 2018) and *Chemistry of Death* (Simon Beckett, 2007). Similarly, the range of high budget television shows with an emphasis on forensic investigations has increased remarkably with series such as *CSI* (Anthony E. Zuiker, CBS, 2000), *Homeland* (Alex Gansa & Howard Gordon Showtime, began 2011), and *The Killing* (Veena Sud, Netflix, 2011). The interest in forensic science in fiction is clearly continuously high, and BBC’s production *Sherlock*, which is still being produced 8 years after it first aired in 2010, is no exception. Although many details in the television series remain faithful to Doyle’s original work, such as certain characterization, plotlines, episode titles and so on, other details are products of the modern setting.

In narrative theory, delays are discussed as necessary in fiction to create suspense and to keep stories from unraveling too quickly. Reasonably, forensic investigations with their narrow focus on details in detective fiction, and in stories about Sherlock Holmes in particular, can be argued to serve as such. Furthermore, adaptation theory becomes of interest when stories of Holmes convert from a text format into television, and from Victorian London to today’s.

This essay will aim to answer the following questions:

1. How much forensic science is used in Doyle’s original stories about Sherlock Holmes (1887, 1892) and how much forensic science is used in the BBC’s *Sherlock* (2010)?
2. What narrative function does forensics have, and to what degree is that function different in written stories compared to television series episodes?

The use of forensic science in Sherlock Holmes, both by Doyle and in more contemporary versions, may serve a literary or narrative function within detective fiction. I will argue that forensic elements interrupt and delay the mysteries from unraveling too quickly, and that it is part of creating suspense. The hypothesis is that the plotline of a contemporary version, with more available and developed forensic methods and techniques, will be more delayed by forensic investigations performed.
2. Materials

The following section presents the material significant for this project. First Doyle’s early stories about Sherlock Holmes found in the novel *A Study in Scarlet* and the short story collection *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* are introduced, then BBC’s television series *Sherlock* is presented. Thereafter, the different settings of the stories and the characters significant for this investigation are introduced.

2.1 The original stories


2.2 The Television Series

In four seasons of three episodes each, the television series *Sherlock*, created by Mark Gatiss and Steven Moffat, broadcast stories of how Holmes still solves mysteries with Dr. Watson, but in a modern setting. The Internet Movie Database’s (henceforth referred to as IMDB) description of the television series is “A modern update finds the famous sleuth and his doctor partner solving crimes in the 21st century London”. The first season aired on the network BBC One in July-August 2010 including the episodes; *A Study in Pink, The Blind Banker,* and *The Great Game.* The second season with the episodes *A Scandal in Belgravia, The Hounds of Baskerville* and *The Reichenbach Fall* aired in early 2012. The third season aired in the beginning of 2014 with the episodes *The Empty Hearse, The Sign of Three* and *His Last
Setting. The fourth season aired in 2018 but is not part of this investigation. Gatiss and Moffat include extensive parts of the original in their production, which is clear from the resembling episode titles.

2.3 Setting
Most of Doyle’s original stories are set in or near London in the 1880s, with 221B Baker Street as the starting point for most mysteries. At that address, Holmes is often found in his study, cleverly deducing, to the point that some mysteries are solved without him leaving the flat.

The television series is set in contemporary London. Although the starting point still is 221B Baker Street, less time is spent there and Holmes moves quickly between his home, crime scenes, and the laboratory. The higher pace may be a result of both format and time of setting. The modern setting equips Holmes with an entirely new set of, which is technologically necessary to solve otherwise impossible mysteries.

2.4 The Characters
Sherlock Holmes is perhaps best described as peculiar. Visually, Frank Wile’s illustrations in The Strand Magazine show a familiar image of Holmes, which includes a hat, a pipe, and a magnifying glass, suggesting that disguise, an interest in smoking tobacco and searching for small objects, are all part of this character’s modus operandi. Doyle emphasized these details and made them part of Sherlock Holmes’s characterization. In A Study in Scarlet, Holmes’ smoking habit is introduced through the conversation where he and Watson are dictating the rules for their future living arrangement on Baker Street.

’I have my eye on a suite in Baker Street,’ he said, ‘which would suit us down to the ground. You don’t mind the smell of strong tobacco, I hope?’
‘I always smoke “ships” myself,’ I answered.
‘That’s good enough. I generally have chemicals about, and occasionally do experiments. Would that annoy you?’ (17).

For the time of the original story setting it was common among middle class men to be heavy smokers. In the series, on the other hand, smoking has gone out of fashion and declared harmful, so Holmes struggles with not smoking and refers to the mystery in A Study in Pink as a “three patch problem” (m. 42), which refers to the nicotine patches he wears and what he considers to be a proper amount of nicotine to deal with the mystery. The time code of each setting properly portrays and adapts the view on nicotine use. Smoking is not the only vice of
Sherlock Holmes. Doyle made addictive and obsessive behaviors a part of Holmes, which has not been neglected in recent adaptations. In “A Scandal in Bohemia”, Holmes is “alternating from week to week between cocaine and ambition” (429). Holmes’ restless trait makes him weak for stimulus so whenever he is not occupied with a mystery that is interesting enough he easily falls for other temptations.

Holmes is a perfectionist in the sense that he is the perfect and superior character, master of reason and logically superior to others, which often result in him being accredited the term genius. In Doyle’s texts, Holmes often examines clues silently and prefers to exclude everyone until he is certain about the answer, and then he unravels his findings. This is all part of his autistic characteristics and consequently Holmes maintains the superior mastermind appearance.

In the BBC television series Holmes is still an analytical genius, to the extent that there is a reoccurring joke about Holmes being a “show off” since he likes to flaunt his intelligence and his superior deductive abilities. Benedict Cumberbatch plays the consulting detective Sherlock Holmes in the series and portrays Holmes as a self-absorbed, obnoxious “High-functioning sociopath” (Holmes), with particularly severe difficulties with social relations, not at all unlike the original.

In The Dynamic Detective, Karin Molander Danielsson comments on Sherlock Holmes, in the company of Poe’s Dupin, and notes that they are both highly original figures, who have remained static but “drawn with the taste for peculiarity and quirks, to the extent that their originality became first expected, later satirized, and soon formulaic” (23). Possibly, Holmes’s formulaic peculiarities and quirks, have been a reason for his survival through time, since they seem to have worked well in variations of adaptations up till today.

Furthermore, whenever there is a Sherlock there is a Watson; detective fiction’s most famous side-kick. Watson is the template for side-kicks and the expression “Watson figure” is a recognized term in literary studies. In Doyle’s works, Watson is the first-person narrator who follows Holmes wherever he goes but does not participate particularly in the action of solving crimes; his function is rather to provide the reader with Holmes’s findings. Watson’s role in BBC’s television series is still to accompany Holmes in his adventures in solving mysteries, even though his character here actively participates instead of solely spectating as in the original. Martin Freeman plays Doctor Watson in the television series, and IMDB describes Watson as “now a fairly young veteran of the Afghan war, less adoring and more active”, which suggests that Watson is also updated in BBC’s adaptation.
Another novelty in the BBC series is a frequently appearing character named Molly Hooper, played by Louise Brealey. She works as a specialist at the hospital laboratory where much of Holmes’ investigations are carried out. In that function, she acts as an expert whom Holmes can consult about matters of forensics.

Frank Wiles’ illustrations of Sherlock Holmes and Watson in The Strand Magazine

3. Previous Research

The following section presents previous research in three parts. The first section deals with character, adaptations, and mastertypes- and plots. Thereafter a section about forensic science in crime fiction is presented. The last part introduces narrative theory and forensic elements as a delaying factor of the story.

3.1 Character, Adaptations, and Master Types

Sherlock Holmes is a particularly recognizable character and here Porter H. Abbot’s discussion of masterplot and types will be useful “The concept of the masterplot is closely bound up with the concept of the type. A type is a recurring kind of character. Cinderella is both a type (embodied in the character Cinderella) and a masterplot (her story)…A masterplot comes equipped with types” (49). The type Sherlock Holmes is clearly the embodied character that returns in fiction, and the masterplot can be understood as a quest detective story. A type enables the possibility to transcend an original plot and setting to appear in any context, and still be recognizable. In *Oxford Dictionary of English Language*, the definition of Sherlock as a noun is “a person who investigates mysteries or shows great perceptiveness”
(1628). These features remain faithful to the Holmes type and are thus expected. In *The Pursuit of Crime*, Dennis Porter claims that “The appeal exerted by Holmes is inherent in his urbane life-style and swagger with which he exhibits the workings of his intellect. His attraction is not only that of power through reason but also leisure and privilege, of upper middle class bachelor life, of heroic adventure punctuated by pipe smoking in gentlemen’s chambers, meditation and opera… Holmes is public school gone scientific” (156). Holmes is extraordinary but comes packaged as someone familiar and easily recognizable. Apart from this, Porter suggests that “heroes often do not travel well and find themselves in need of updating every generation or so” (159). Even though Holmes is a type, the character still needs to adapt to changes in order to survive. On this subject, Molander Danielsson claims that “the early detective fiction did not put as much emphasis on character and characterization as the contemporary variety does, but a memorable detective is, of course, a crucial element… he is the driving force of the novel and very often what defines it” (43). Although Holmes has always been peculiar, he has been updated, refined and now exceptionally portrayed by Cumberbatch. Sherlock Holmes passes as both a type and a masterplot since his original existing stories re-occur in adaptations and, Holmes the character has managed to survive in different contexts and numerous updates.

A common concern with adaptations when discussed by literary scholars is their fidelity to the original work. However, Thomas Leitch, writes in his introduction to *Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory* that “What could be more audacious than to argue that the study of moving images as adaptations of literary works, (...) has been neglected?” (149). This is followed by an explanatory list of fallacies in regards to adaptation theory, practices and mindsets earlier rejected by literary scholars. Among the listed fallacies is that “Novels create more complex characters than movies because they offer more immediate and complete access to characters’ psychological states” (158). This is a useful idea when proposing that it is possible for Holmes in the television series to be more complex than Holmes in the original. Combined with Molander Danielsson’s claim that less emphasis was put on characterization in early detective fiction, it is plausible for the character Sherlock Holmes to be more developed in the series. Furthermore, Leitch claims a fallacy to be that literary texts are verbal and films visual “Instead of saying that literary texts are verbal and movies aren’t, it would be more accurate to say that movies depend on prescribed, unalterable visual and verbal performances in a way literary texts don’t” (154). Leitch accredits verbal abilities to the film format that enable verbal and visual performances to be presented simultaneously in a screen adaption, which in turn enables the possibility to communicate more content in less time.
On the list of suggested fallacies is also “Fidelity is the most appropriate criterion to use in analyzing adaptations” (161), and “Adaptations are adapting exactly one text a piece” (10). Although much content in the series originates from Doyle’s work, they are not adapting one text per piece, nor do they remain completely faithful to their original. Nonetheless, the content and references from the original are successfully retrieved in the adaptation *Sherlock*, even in the modern setting.

3.2 Forensics in Crime Fiction

The interest in forensic science seems to have increased with its development through time. In *Science and the Fight Against Crime*, Brian. H. Kay states that “Judging by the number of popular television shows in which a master detective fights the war against crime, many people are fascinated by the solving of crimes. Increasingly science is involved in unraveling crimes both in television dramas and in real-life situations” (3). Solving crimes is interesting, and forensics is tied to that, resulting in more crime fiction including elements of forensic science. In *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science*, Ronald R. Thomas suggests that “the history of detective fiction is deeply implicated with the history of forensic technology” (3). Thomas emphasizes that, historically, the relationship between detective fiction and forensic technology has been close. Furthermore, he proposes that “each of these detective devices – fingerprint technology, forensics, profiling, crime photography – is itself the nineteenth-century invention designed to convert the body into a text to be read. Each also serves as a potent analogy for the literary detective” (4). If forensic technology and relatable techniques are given the function to transform a body, or traces of it, into text in detective fiction, then forensics must be assigned significance in itself for crime fiction. The body, or traces of it, is found at the crime scene and provides evidence crucial for a crime investigation, which often plays a crucial part of the mystery.

Forensic technology and the unraveling of a mystery attract readers because of its exciting nature. Therefore, forensics is perfectly suited for the detective fiction and partly reason for the great interest in this particular genre. Jason G. Linville and Ray H. Liu (2008) write in their article *Forensic Science: Fact and Fiction* that forensics is

Glamorized in books, movies, television, and recently in the news media, forensic science has gathered a popular following. Making forensic science interesting and appealing to a large audience is easy to do because the work is just that--interesting and appealing. The fictional forensic scientist collects evidence at crime scenes, analyzes it in a high-tech lab, and draws on objective science to reconstruct the details of the crime. It is a very satisfying story. Science uncovers lies and reveals the truth. Justice is done as innocents are set free and the guilty are convicted.
Although Linville and Liu’s main concern in their article is that students apply for an education within the field of forensics without an adequate perception of its meaning, they also manage to account for the fact that forensics is interesting and appealing because it reveals lies and convicts the villain, regardless of fiction or reality, which easily can be an explanation for its popularity among the audience. Furthermore, in the same fashion as Thomas proposes that forensics makes an interesting read it is equally well suited for the television screen where the investigation is also visual, as emphasized by Leitch.

3.3 Forensics as a Digression or Delay in Crime Fiction in General

Forensic science in detective fiction functions as a delaying element of the story, mainly because it slows down the unraveling of the mystery by examining details instead of moving forward. Porter states that:

The actual business of detection may imply narrow concentration on a task and end-orientated urgency. Its literary representation, however, functions only as a source of pleasure when the task in hand is constantly interrupted by a variety of devices and diverting features that are experienced as more or less pleasurable in themselves (54).

Pleasurable and relevant interruptions of the end oriented task are welcome in detective fiction and contribute with variation to a story that could appear flat without it. The overall agreement about delays within narrative theory is that it is part of how suspense is created and necessary for not reaching the end of the story too quickly. Peter J. Rabinowitz refers to them as “intended not to attract notice, but rather to fill space” (70). Simply put, delays serve as space fillers in the narrative, yet it is imperative that this function eludes the reader. Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan suggests when discussing delays that it is a concern of the text’s own survival “If the text is understood too quickly, it would thereby come to an untimely end. (...) it is in the text’s interest to slow down the process of comprehension by the reader as to ensure its own survival”. (122-123). The use of delaying elements here seem like a necessity for detective fiction since they are decisive both for slowing down the reader’s comprehension of the text, and the survival of it. Nevertheless, for the text to be understood at all, Rimmon-Kenan emphasizes that a text must contain codes and frames familiar to the reader. Molander Danielsson suggests that

the special interest material can provide the text with the delays and digressions which create suspense, through well-placed interruptions of the action (...) In detective fiction, which more than any other genre depends for its success on suspense, delaying and digressive elements have to be numerous. These digressions, although usually not conspicuous, have become conventional, or formulaic, and thus are expected (78).
In sum, without delays or digressions, the detective story would lose its main appeal; suspense.

Special interest material serves well as a feature of delay according to Molander Danielsson, who defines the term to be “political, ethnic, regional, professional or hobby-related agenda of an interest group (consisting, usually, of both writers, readers and protagonists), which is used as an integral part of the detective story” (13). Even though forensics is part of the deduction, whose purpose is to reach a solution and come to a conclusion, it lays focus on details, technology and techniques of analysis, which instead delays the proceeding of the story, making it suitable special interest material. Porter suggests that:

given that crime and its investigation remain largely fixed, most of the novelty is to be found not in the progressive sequences of actions, but in the digressive effects (…) Crime solving is a vehicle making possible a journey whose stopovers are frequently more enjoyable than the purposeful approach to a destination itself (55).

In addition to slowing down the story in order not to reach the goal too fast, and to be a pleasurable read, delaying features function as an opportunity for novelty in crime investigations. The forensic field consistently moves forward and develops in real life, and the possible use of it within fiction reach even further, which, undoubtedly, contribute to novelty to the largely fixed investigations. Porter, whilst speaking of delays, mentions that “it contributes, as an element of montage, to the construction of a character” (56). If this is true, then it is possible to suggest that with forensic development comes a more developed character in more recent works.

4. Method Description

This investigation intends to examine if there is a significant difference in the use of forensics as a delaying element in Doyle’s original texts and BBC’s television series Sherlock. My hypothesis is that the extent of forensic occurrence in fiction increases with the real life development of forensic methods. With more available forensic technology, there will be more delays in fiction caused by forensic investigations. Therefore, Doyle’s early works, the novel A Study in Scarlet and the first volume of short stories The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, will be compared to the three first seasons of BBC’s television series Sherlock (2010, Gatiss, Moffat).
The investigation is both quantitative, to demonstrate how much of the total space of the story is taken up by forensic delays, and qualitative to examine how forensic science delays the plot from moving forward in each set of works by comparative analysis.

The quantitative investigation examines in Doyle’s work how many lines convey forensics, and that number of lines is divided with the text’s total number of lines, which give a percentage. It is counted by an average of 44 lines per page. In a similar way, the forensic extent in BBC’s television series is measured in how much time it takes, divided with the episode’s total time, which also gives a percentage. Each episode is approximately 90 minutes long. These calculations aim to demonstrate how much each work is disturbed or interrupted by forensic delays.

The qualitative analysis compares how dramatized forensics segments delay in Doyle and BBC’s stories, in particular the set of pairs; *A Study in Scarlet* and *A Study in Pink*, and “A Scandal in Bohemia” and *A Scandal in Belgravia* are closer analyzed. This part examines what events the audience has to wait for because of forensic delays, what forensic methods are used, and how the different formats are delayed by forensics.

In the terminology forensic delay I include forensic elements or events that keep the story from reaching its end. Practically, this includes crime scene investigations, analysis of objects, and any communication involving explanations of how and why mysteries are or have been executed.
5. Results in Tables

There are forensic segments of delays in all examined works. The average percentage differs approximately 5% between Doyle and BBC’s works, in favor of the latter. Both the highest and the lowest number of forensic delays in percentage are found in Doyle’s works. Consequently, the television series episodes contain more evenly of forensic delays than Doyle’s stories, which benefit the average number, as can be seen in table 1.1.

Table 1.2 emphasizes that the forensic methods used in the television series are both of a higher number, and more technologically advanced.

**Table 1.1.** The magnitude of forensic delays in Doyle’s texts, and BBC’s television series *Sherlock.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title of Doyle’s story</th>
<th>Forensic magnitude in %</th>
<th>Title of BBC episodes</th>
<th>Forensic magnitude in %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Study in Scarlet</td>
<td>20,7%</td>
<td>A Study in Pink</td>
<td>22,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A Scandal in Bohemia”</td>
<td>6,1%</td>
<td>The Blind Banker</td>
<td>17,9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Red-Headed League”</td>
<td>12,5%</td>
<td>The Great Game</td>
<td>26,9 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A Case of Identity”</td>
<td>18,1%</td>
<td>A Scandal in Belgravia</td>
<td>18,6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Boscombe Valley Mystery”</td>
<td>16,8%</td>
<td>The Hounds of Baskerville</td>
<td>24,8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Five Orange Pips”</td>
<td>19,3%</td>
<td>The Reichenbach Fall</td>
<td>15,5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Man with the Twisted Lip”</td>
<td>7,5%</td>
<td>The Empty Hearse</td>
<td>23,0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Blue Carbuncle”</td>
<td>12,6%</td>
<td>The Sign of Three</td>
<td>19,5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Speckled Band”</td>
<td>18,1%</td>
<td>His Last Vow</td>
<td>14,7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Engineer’s Thumb”</td>
<td>9,8%</td>
<td><strong>Average:</strong></td>
<td><strong>20,3%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Noble Bachelor”</td>
<td>35,7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>“The Beryl Coronet”</td>
<td>17,3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Copper Beeches”</td>
<td>2,7%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average:</strong></td>
<td><strong>15,1%</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1.2. Objects for forensic examination, and forensic methods found in the comparable pairs. BBC’s television series contains more objects to examine and methods to use while doing so.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Doyle’s Work</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>BBC’s Work</th>
<th>Object</th>
<th>Method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Study in Scarlet</td>
<td>-Footprints, -Dead body</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>A Study in Pink</td>
<td>-Dead body; Jewelry, mud stains, damp, -Smartphone</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Bloodstains</td>
<td>Smelling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Beat corpse Laboratory tests</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Ring</td>
<td>Laboratory blood tests</td>
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<td></td>
<td>CSI;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Ash</td>
<td>CSI; Testing pills on dog</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Google</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Carriage tracks</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Weather</td>
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<td>-Handwriting</td>
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<td>Forecast</td>
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<td>-Wheel traces</td>
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<td>GPS</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Ointment box with pills (poison)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Texting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“A Scandal in Bohemia”</td>
<td>-Paper</td>
<td>Observation</td>
<td>A Scandal in Belgravia</td>
<td>-Smartphone</td>
<td>Observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Letter</td>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Video call Identification</td>
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<td>Screening</td>
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<td>X-ray</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Testing codes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.1 Discussion of Qualitative Results

The result in table 1.1 demonstrates a difference in the average percentage between Doyle’s original texts, and BBC’s series adaptation of approximately 5%. Table 1.1 also shows that one of the original work “The Noble Bachelor” has the most extensive forensic delay of 35.7% of the story’s total text, compared to the highest percentage in the television series, found in the episode *The Great Game*, consisting of 26.9 % of the total time in. Findings from this investigation show that one reason for high numbers in Doyle’s works in general consisted in long explanations by Holmes of how he reached the solution, which is done in “The Noble Bachelor”. Particular for this short story though, is the extensive investigation that is performed by Holmes and Watson. The combination of both following the ongoing
investigation and getting the extensive explanation by Holmes result in a vast delay caused by forensic technology.

The lowest figure is also found among Doyle's works in “The Copper Beeches” with only 2.7%, while the lowest number found among the series episodes is 14.7% in *His Last Vow*. What characterized the low numbers of forensic delays in Doyle’s work were when clients consulting Holmes gave long and vivid descriptions of their cases, which keeps the story from moving forward. Holding both the highest and the lowest numbers, the original works are considerably more uneven in terms of the extent of forensic elements creating a delaying segments in the text.

A possible reason for the considerably low numbers found in *Sherlock* may be a result of the televised format. In the series, Holmes’ possibilities to investigate a crime scene and to communicate his findings at the same time are greater than in the texts. Table 1.2 demonstrates what objects that are subject to forensic investigations and what methods are used to do so. It is clear that the list of the series consists of technically advanced methods and objects. Furthermore, the series’ list of objects and methods is longer, which was the base for the original hypothesis: that the development of forensic methods and technical tools would be decisive for the outcome, favoring the adaptation, since more possible investigative methods would enable more extensive delays from the use of this. That theory would find support from Thomas’s statement that “detective fiction is deeply implicated with the history of forensic technology” (3), and from Berg’s claim that Sherlock Holmes always has been conductive of forensic investigations, to the extent in which it will have influenced the development of forensic methods even outside of fiction.

6. Episode and Story Analyses and Comparisons

The fact that several of the television episodes are more or less faithful adaptations of the original stories makes a comparison, and analysis of the development of forensics, all the more interesting.

The format of the story is one of the most crucial variables when looking at how much of the mystery’s total extent consists of delaying segments caused by forensic elements. Although texts mediate several things at the time, in terms of feelings, implied meanings and so on, it differs from how a screen production can show conversation and action simultaneously. Forensic elements include investigations of crime scenes and explanations of how conclusions are drawn from the evidence, which is not done simultaneously in the text. A
description of how Holmes looks and behaves while examining specific details takes up a
certain space; his monologues or dialogues about clues and evidence collected at the crime
scene also takes a certain space from the total extent of the text, which in turn delay the story.
Furthermore, the expositions of how conclusions have been drawn from the evidence also
take up space from the text. The point here is that all of these elements are of forensic
character that delay the action and are described one at a time. In contrast, a filmed adaption
offers the opportunity to do multiple things at the same time. The series’ audience can see
Holmes visit a crime scene and conduct conversation while performing an investigation,
which result in the segment of delay being less extended in the series compared to the texts.
Consequences from this can be seen in the fact that more forensic methods are used in the
series, and more advanced reasoning is presented, yet the forensics in the series does not take
up more time from the story when multiple things are done simultaneously. Leitch made a
point in objecting to that “Literary texts are verbal, films visual” and he states that “movies
depend on prescribed, unalterable visual and verbal performances in a way literary texts do
not” (154). In contrast to the text format, the television series is both verbal and visual, which
means that the viewer can see characters perform actions on the screen while communicating
verbally.

Although the idea that “Adaptations are adapting exactly one text a piece”(10) was
listed as a fallacy by Leitch, similar plotlines do enable easy comparison and demonstration of
forensic delays. In what follows, I will use Doyle’s novel A Study in Scarlet compared to the
series episode A Study in Pink, as an example of how forensics works as a delay.

The first thing one has to wait for because of a forensic delay is Watson’s first meeting
with Sherlock Holmes.

In both versions, the first meeting between Watson and Holmes takes place in the
hospital laboratory, which becomes a forensic delay as it disturbs the story’s mystery from
being introduced. Although it is not the mystery that is interrupted since it has not yet started,
it is a delay of the action in regards that it keeps the story from moving forward, or to start at
all, and it fills up space in a pleasurable way, a definition that at least Rabinowitz would agree
to.

In the novel A Study in Scarlet Stamford describes parts of Holmes’ forensic methods to
Watson on their way to the laboratory where they are to meet for the first time; “‘When it
comes to beating the subjects in the dissecting rooms with a stick, it’s certainly taking a
bizarre shape.’ ‘Beating the subjects!’ ‘Yes, to verify how far bruises may be produced after
death. I saw him at it with my own eyes’”(15). The narration of Holmes’ forensic method in
beating a corpse to cause bruises is a forensic delay that keeps them from meeting and part of introducing the character to the reader.

In the series episode *A Study in Pink*, Holmes performs the corresponding examination of how long it takes for bruises to appear on a dead body prior to his first acquaintance with Watson. However, the difference is that the viewer gets to watch Holmes beat the corpse on the screen and therefore is introduced to Holmes before Watson is. Another difference is that Holmes is not alone doing this in the series but accompanied by the forensic specialist Molly Hooper, which is a point for later analysis. Regardless, the scene is of forensic character and delays Holmes and Watson’s first meeting as in the original text.

In the novel, the beating of a corpse is a past event verbally described by a minor insignificant character, while in the series it happens on screen both visually and verbally, supporting Leitch’s ideas that screen adaptations are visual and verbal and that the fidelity to the original work might vary.

Thereafter, in connection with the characters introduction to one another, the novel spends much space on explaining the importance of hemoglobin for criminal investigation purposes, since this is new and remarkable in the 1880s, and because it delays the mystery from starting even more. In the series, on the other hand, that information is not considered, possibly because of its lack of novelty today. Laboratory time, instead, is spent on Holmes analyzing Watson’s persona from his appearance only. Thereafter, the actual mystery is given some room to develop.

Once the mystery is ongoing, we find Holmes and his newfound side-kick at a crime scene. Here it becomes even clearer that the text format only deals with one thing at a time, as the reader first reads the description of how Holmes carefully investigates a corpse at the crime scene;

As he spoke, he whipped a tape measure and a large round magnifying glass from his pocket. With these two implements he trotted noiselessly about the room, sometimes, stopping, occasionally kneeling, and once lying flat upon his face. So engrossed was he with his occupation that he appeared to have forgotten our presence, for he chattered away to himself under his breath the whole time, keeping up a running fire of exclamations, groans, whistles and little cries suggestive of encouragement and hope (31).

Watson’s observations of Holmes examining the crime scene are later glossed when Holmes himself shares his conclusions from the investigation:

There has been a murder done, and the murderer was a man. He was more than six feet high, was in the prime of life, had small feet for his height, wore coarse, squared toed boots and smoked a Trichinopoly cigar. He came here with his victim in a four-wheeled cab, which was drawn by a horse with three old shoes and one new on his off foreleg. In all probability the murderer had a florid face, and the fingernails of his right hand were remarkably long…”If
this man was murdered, how was it done?’... ‘Poison’ said Sherlock Holmes, and strode off’ (32).

From the perspective that this serves as a segment of delay, it is favorable to only progress one thing at a time. The reader must first read about what Holmes looks like when he investigates the crime scene and later read about what he found during his investigation, which becomes clear when Holmes accounts for his findings and conclusions drawn from them. Having the reader wait for this information raises the suspense before the mystery uncovers. Holmes’ presented deductions in the quote end chapter three in the novel, and chapter four begins with Holmes giving more details to these deductions. The prolonged event of carefully explaining details delays the plot even more and keeps the reader form the next course of action that instead will move them forward in the mystery. What unfolds when Holmes is finished is a hearing of a constable to collect more details for the investigation.

In the series episode A Study in Pink, on the other hand, the viewer can see Holmes investigate the corresponding crime scene in a similar way described in the novel, but with words popping up on the screen to help the audience understand what he is examining and thinking such as “wet” and “dry” when he is touching different parts of the victim’s clothes. From this, the viewer will understand what is being investigated while it is implemented.

Similar to the novel, Holmes’ explanations to the case are presented just before he leaves the scene, but here with a “walk and talk” principle, as he tells the police of his findings on his way down the staircase.

They take the poison themselves. It’s murder, all of them. I don’t know how. But they are not suicides, they are killings, serial killings. We’ve got ourselves a serial killer. I love those. There’s always something to look forward to (…) Serial killers are always hard, you have to wait for them to make a mistake. She color coordinates her shoes and her lipstick—‘But what is the mistake?’ ‘PINK!’ (m. 30).

This “walk and talk” solution suits the television format better since it would be pointless to spend time watching him leave solely. Furthermore, it gives an impression of urgency to speak while moving forward, which disguises the delay as a part of progression in the story. What the audience gets to wait for is Watson being kidnapped by Sherlock’s brother Mycroft, which introduces subplots and characters that are useful for proceeding episodes. In this episode, it becomes a delay because it keeps the audience from Holmes’ continued investigation. However, the introducing and building of subplots and characters main function is to create possible future subplots, while the forensic elements in particular episodes delay the solving of specific mysteries. Since A Study in Pink is the first episode in a series, both are needed. Molander Danielsson suggested that detective fiction in particular, must contain
numerous delaying elements in order to successfully create suspense (78), a criterion that both works seem to meet since they are interrupting one delay with another.

When it comes to approaching a resolution to the mystery, and to clear out the details between the hunt and the kill, both works want to end up at more or less the same conclusion, that the cabby is the perpetrator who has murdered his victims with poisonous pills.

The novel *A Study in Scarlet* consists of two parts, and the last five pages of the first part are spent on a forensic delay, in that Holmes has figured the mystery out and from that point reveals his findings the five remaining pages.

'The last link,' he cried, exultantly. 'My case is complete.'
The two detectives stared at him in amazement.
'I have now in my hands,' my companion said, confidently, 'all the threads which have formed such a tangle. There are, of course, details to be filled in, but I am certain of the main facts, from the time that Drebber parted from Stangerson at the station, up to the discovery of the body of the latter, as if I had seen them with my own eyes. I will give you proof of my knowledge. Could you lay your hand upon those pills?' (51)

The five pages that follow gradually build suspense for the final disclosure. Rabinowitz would call this a space filler (70), and Rimmon-Kenan describes it as slowing down the process of comprehending the text to ensure its own survival (122-123). The exposition Holmes delivers over the next pages gives the reader a context where all clues and evidence are revealed and explained, which contribute to the reader's understanding of the text. Because this exposition is extensive, it also ensures the survival of the text, for at least five more pages, since the reader likely enjoys the accelerating build of suspense and excitement all the way to the disclosure. This kind of forensic delay where Holmes reveals details of his deductions in retrospect to the solution prevents what Rimmon-Kenan also calls an untimely ending since it enables completion of the mystery's puzzle before the story ends. Similarly, part two of *A Study in Scarlet* ends with Holmes presenting his conclusions, after a plot that has been greatly occupied by the perpetrator from part one telling his background story. When much text is taken up by stories told by characters, most commonly clients, the extent of how narrated forensic segments delay in the story tend to decrease.

In the series episode *A Study in Pink* the ending and resolution are similar to those of the original text, but with the exception that events unfold simultaneously instead of one at a time. Holmes and the audience know already that the cabby is the murderer, but Holmes follows the cabby willingly when he is picked up, because he cannot resist solving the mystery first hand, regardless of the possible danger. Instead of Holmes solely explaining the course of action of the mystery, as in the original text, he is part of it as the cabby's last victim. Together, Holmes
and the cabby finish the puzzle; by playing the same game as the other victims were exposed to; choosing the good or the bad pill. While they are playing this mental game, their dialogue contributes with questions, answers and conclusions that unravel the mystery. The scene is part of the action, in the way that Holmes is playing the game, but it is also a delay of the episode since the viewer waits for the disclosure that the cabby is doing James Moriarty’s dirty work. At the same time as the game is played, the scene is regularly interrupted by scenes where Watson searches for Holmes. Out of the episode’s total time of 90 minutes, this takes 20. Here it becomes interesting, in regards to the difference in format. The original texts end and stand as more or less individual mysteries. The series builds on, the next episode is a new mystery, but it is also part of the same hunt that has just started of Moriarty. Cliffhangers surely contribute to the creating of suspense but also welcome an untimely end so that the audience has something to wait for.

“A Scandal in Bohemia” and A Scandal in Belgravia constitute the next pair to compare. A Scandal in Belgravia is the first episode of the second season, which introduces and demonstrates the concept of a cliffhanger nicely since the episode starts in the middle of the unfolding action where the previous episode left off. The fact that the audience had to wait for the resolution of season one until the beginning of season two surely makes a proper delay and causes suspense, even though that delay is a long wait rather than distracting content. In the opening scene, Holmes is finally standing eye to eye with the “consulting criminal” Moriarty, which is what the first season has led up to. Until then, three episodes have built up suspense around the uncovering of Holmes’ evil opponent. When Moriarty receives a phone call from Irene Adler, the action is blown off, which in a way ends the previous episode The Great Game, and leaves room for the mystery of A Scandal in Belgravia to begin.

The short story “A Scandal in Bohemia” does not start with a cliffhanger, but with “To Sherlock she is always, the woman” (429), which is also a reference to Adler. In regards to forensic delay in this short story, the bigger parts are found before the mystery starts, with a close examination of a letter.

I carefully examined the writing, and the paper upon which it was written. ‘The man who wrote it has presumably well to do,’ I remarked, endeavoring to imitate my companion’s process. ‘Such paper could not be brought under half a crown a packet. It is peculiarly strong and stiff.’ ‘Peculiar - that is the very word,’ said Holmes. ‘It is not an English paper at all. Hold it up to the light.’… ‘The paper was made in Bohemia,’ (431-432).

The examination of the letter takes place in great detail which delays the Bohemian King’s arrival on Baker Street, where he is to consult the detective for a mystery to be solved. The client describes the mystery to Holmes; thereafter the investigation is implemented with the
purpose of obtaining a photograph that Adler keeps as a catch on the Bohemian king. Even though they fail to bring the item from its position, Holmes still managed to locate it.

When a woman thinks that her house is on fire, her instinct is at once to rush to the things which she values most. It is a perfectly overpowering impulse, and I have more than once taken advantage of it…The photograph is in a recess behind a sliding panel just above the right bell-pull (445).

Holmes description of how he knows where the photograph is delays the next step of the story, which is that they will go back for it tomorrow. Prior to Holmes’ exposition, Watson asks Holmes if he got hold of the photo, with the reply “No, but I know where it is”. From there, the fastest way to move forward in the story would be to jump ahead directly to tomorrow’s plans, but instead, it is delayed by Holmes’ explanation of how and why he knows where the photograph is located. In the short story “A Scandal in Bohemia” as demonstrated, the narrated forensic segments of delay are found before the mystery starts, and just before the mystery unravels.

In the series episode A Scandal in Belgravia on the other hand, forensic delays occur approximately every ten minutes. After the cliffhanger, the new episode is introduced with three brief crime scenes where Holmes appears within the first ten minutes. The fourth crime scene gets more time, Watson is sent there with a computer for Holmes to perform an investigation via video call. Holmes motivates this solution of his absence with a scale of how interesting he finds the case “Look, this is a six. There is no point in my leaving the flat for anything less than a seven” (m. 11). Meanwhile giving Watson instructions of what to do, men in costumes come to escort Holmes to his next client. From observing the men’s appearances Holmes deducts where he is going, but still refuses to dress, and Watson is brought to the same destination, Buckingham Palace, by helicopter. The scene in the palace is what the audience has been waiting for until fourteen minutes into the episode, delayed by cliffhangers and forensic crime scene investigations. Had this been conveyed through text, one thing at a time, certainly, it would have taken up more space than it does in the series.

That Holmes is using high-end technology, such as computers, to perform a crime scene investigation through streaming is a clear marker of the time where the story is set. Except for video streaming, Holmes performs an x-ray scanning of Adler’s cell phone later in A Scandal in Belgravia, which is also a modern technique that causes a delay of the story because of the non-progressive findings. The scene in the laboratory, where Holmes is seen together with Molly Hooper, delays Holmes from finding Adler in his bed at home. Numerous events like this are seen throughout the series, which outlined my hypothesis that more forensic
techniques available would equal a more extended segments of delay. The fact that there is an extra character in Hooper to cover laboratory forensic science in the series emphasizes its importance to the deduction in the series. Whenever Holmes is found in the laboratory, Hooper is there to assist him. Hooper also serves the purpose to conduct conversations with Holmes that help the audience understand the forensic findings, which in a way is similar to the supporting role of Watson, but here emphasis is strictly forensic. In table 1.2 it is clear that the number of objects forensically examined, and the methods to do so are significantly higher in favor of the series. Hypothetically, this combined would weigh in favor of the extent of forensic delays in the series compared to the text, which, in the end it did not.

It is worth acknowledging that there are more differences between Doyle’s and BBC’s works on Sherlock Holmes than those discussed here. Future studies on this may investigate additional differences.

7. Concluding Discussion

This analysis of forensic investigations as a narrative function that interrupts and delays the story from reaching its resolution shows that the more contemporary television series Sherlock uses forensics more than Doyle’s original works. The segments of delay caused by forensic elements in the series outnumber that of the original work and the forensic elements take up more space of the total story and include more advanced methods and technology. Hence, a correlation between the extent of forensic science appearance in fiction and the development of forensic technology and methods through time can be seen. Berg referred to Holmes as a pioneer of forensic science, who has helped advancement in technology, and even now Holmes is at the forefront of technological advancement used in the series Sherlock. An additional character that is a forensic expert has been introduced in Molly Hooper, which highlights the importance and necessity of forensic technology in contemporary detective fiction. Hooper acts like someone who can help explain to the audience what is going on forensically, which in a way complements Watson’s side-kick function.

Although the series is more extendedly delayed by forensic elements, the difference is not as significant as expected. The format in which the stories are told proved to be heavily decisive for the result, in the way that the series manages to convey plot content much more time efficiently in relation to its total time, compared to the text. Texts communicate one thing at a time for example, when the text is occupied with conveying one of Holmes’ revelations of the mystery, nothing but that monologue happens simultaneously. The texts give many details
that are spacious forensic delays. The fact that the television series is both verbal and visual enables a higher pace for details to unfold on the screen. Narrated delays that in a text format require much space can more time efficiently play out in the series resulting in a minor delay when compared. Therefore, the result is significantly affected by which format the stories are presented in.

Conclusively, the idea that more advanced forensic technology available in real life equals more use of it in fiction seems to be accurate, even though variables such as format affect the result significantly. This is clear for Sherlock Holmes in particular. Ultimately, the novelty in deductive methods is part of what makes Holmes unique and appealing.

8. Works Cited

Primary Material


Secondary Material


Also Mentioned


Gansa, Alex and Howard, Gordon, creators. Homeland. Showtime, 2011