

“To face it like a man”:

Exploring Male Anxiety in *Dracula* and the Sherlock Holmes Canon

Miriam Bjørklund



A thesis in English Literature
Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities
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<http://www.duo.uio.no>

Print: Reprosentralen, Universitetet i Oslo

Abstract

This thesis posits that the genre of the male quest romance, highly popular during the British *fin de siècle*, was a literary response to increased male anxiety during that period. Reading works belonging to this genre, this thesis sees writers treating approaches to masculinity not as something simple and monolithic, but as diverse and fraught with uncertainty of definition. This thesis demonstrates that the ways in which men in these novels deal with threats to their masculine identity, clearly show that masculinity is experienced as a concept no less complicated than femininity. The specific threats treated here are the role of women, men's sexuality, and mental illness. In the interest of equality, and in an academic setting where “gender studies” are frequently synonymous with “women's studies”, it is hoped that an academic approach to the male quest romance genre will lead to new understandings of the complexity of masculinity as a basis for identity. The introduction explains the socio-cultural context in which the primary texts were written, clarifies important terms and gives an overview of which theories this thesis draws on. Chapter 1 discusses how the Sherlock Holmes tales explore unconventional models of masculinity, while Chapter 2 argues that *Dracula* reinforces certain traditional aspects of gender roles in order to counter the destabilisation of masculine identity. Findings and new insights are outlined in the conclusion.

Acknowledgements

To produce a thesis, even a relatively short one like this, in a matter of five months requires more than one person's efforts. There are several people whose contributions I am happy to acknowledge here; however, as this is a thesis on English literature and not an Oscar speech, I will try to be brief. I want to give heartfelt thanks to:

Erika Johanna Kvistad, for supervising this thoroughly, efficiently and not scathingly, and for being brave enough to take on a thesis pretty much mid-semester;

Tore Rem, for inspiring and guiding me through the initiation of this project, and for giving classes that got me interested in Victorian literature to begin with;

Nils Axel Nissen, for help and reading suggestions, as well as truly inspiring classes;

Øyvor Nyborg, for invaluable academic support (and yoga classes);

Thea Gustavsen and Béatrice Thorstensen, for draft feedback and helpful tips;

The coffee crew at Blindern, for being there every step of the way. Especially Thea and Kjetil, whom I never thought I would like this much, but now am strangely reluctant to not have around.

List of abbreviations

Adventures	The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes
Casebook	The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes
Hound	The Hound of the Baskervilles
Memoirs	The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes
Return	The Return of Sherlock Holmes
The Sign	The Sign of the Four
Study	A Study in Scarlet
Valley	The Valley of Fear

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Introduction

'God! God! God!' he said. 'What have we done, what has this poor thing done, that we are so sore beset? Is there fate amongst us still, sent down from the pagan world of old, that such things must be, and in such a way? ... Oh, how we are beset! How are all the powers of the devils against us!'

(*Dracula* 126)

A thick, black cloud swirled before my eyes, and my mind told me that in this cloud, unseen as yet, but about to spring out upon my appalled senses, lurked all that was vaguely horrible, all that was monstrous and inconceivably wicked in the universe. Vague shapes swirled and swam amid the dark cloud-bank, each a menace and a warning of something coming, the advent of some unspeakable dweller upon the threshold whose very shadow would blast my soul.

("The Devil's Foot", *His Last Bow* 392)

The above quotations express a feeling of being under siege, of constant and numerous threats hanging over the speaker. One's very soul is in danger. Such a sense of threat recurs in critics and historians' depictions of what Elaine Showalter in *Sexual Anarchy* (1991) calls "the crisis in masculinity" of the British *fin de siècle* (17). The term implies that men were experiencing a new state of things, a state that many men perceived as dangerous, that challenged their understanding of themselves as individuals and as a gender. Janet Oppenheim notes, in "*Shattered Nerves*" (1991), that during the *fin de siècle*, British men "felt anxiety about their masculinity, as defined by their culture, and about society's expectations for them" (178). Although this anxiety is not unique to the last decades of the nineteenth century, such new developments as the Women's Rights movement increased men's feelings of uncertainty. Women's changing attitudes to gender roles meant that men must rethink their own conceptions of them; if women's roles changed, men's roles could not expect to remain unproblematic. "The recurrent theme of the cultural politics of the *fin de siècle* was instability, and gender was arguably the most destabilizing category. It is no coincidence that the New Woman materialized alongside the decadent and the dandy," Sally Ledger explains in her essay "The New Woman and the crisis of Victorianism" (22).

During this volatile time, several new and forceful challenges to the status quo appeared. Women campaigned for their rights; homosexual acts were outlawed and queer men were both prosecuted and persecuted; native peoples rebelled against the British Empire. The rise of new medical professions and pseudo-sciences systematised and pathologised sufferings and preferences alike; sexual deviancy was now a disease, and sensitivity could be seen as dangerously similar to

neurasthenia. A man was not simply a man; he was a man surrounded by women seeking to share his political power, by homosexuals who were believed capable of tainting others with their degenerate proclivities (not to mention the fear of discovery for queer men), by men of other races seeking to reclaim the lands taken from them, and by doctors telling him that mental illness was not only difficult to overcome, it was “disgraceful” and “a source of embarrassment” (Oppenheim 145). The identity of the British man at the *fin de siècle* was beset, as it would seem, by brave new devils. In this thesis I examine the ramifications of this crisis in literature; specifically in British literature belonging to the male quest romance genre. Before I explore this genre in detail, a better understanding of the nature of the crisis is necessary.

The sense of being threatened normally depends on a threat being present, or at least perceived as such, but what exactly is meant here by threat? How would a man feel threatened by the prospect of mental illness, for example? In short, the word *threat* is used here to denote a destabilising agent in the context of men's identities; something which has the potential to challenge or change the way in which men and society think about masculinity. Things which challenge a stable understanding of one's identity constitute such an agent, because the stability of a man's identity is threatened when that identity must change. Ruth Robbins puts it very succinctly: “The fear of an ending aroused by the term *fin de siècle* is intimately related to notions of multiplicity: above all the fear that the anarchy of multiple interpretations will replace the safety of one view of the world” (138). A new multiplicity of masculinity was becoming ever more prominent as the nineteenth century drew to a close, and this very multiplicity could be considered a threat in itself. In addition, the new interpretations – the new challenges to a simplified idea of masculinity – were each a separate threat.

The nature of these threats is dual; they affect individuals in different ways. First, as direct sources of threat to one's power or personal well being; the cause of the instability. For example, the suffragettes demanded access to some measure of political power, therefore such women could be seen as threatening men's identity as sole executors of this power. Homosexual men, as demonstrated so clearly by the Oscar Wilde trials of 1895, were defined by the 1885 Labouchère Amendment as criminals; thus being sexually deviant could put a man at risk of imprisonment, as well as of dishonouring his family and friends. Therefore a man was, as a result of normative views of sexuality, potentially the recipient of the threat¹. Homosexual men, however, could also be perceived as the source of the threat rather than the recipients of it: homosexuality “was both an affront and a threat to English manliness” (Oppenheim 175). The invert's immorality could taint

1 Nils Axel Nissen states, of the cultural mindset of the time: “to this way of thinking, all nonprocreative, nonmarital, noncoital sexual acts are perverted and unnatural” (*Romantic Friendship Reader* 6). Simply put, sanctioned sexuality was a far narrower field than what was not sanctioned, and deviancy was not limited to homosexuality.

other men; Oscar Wilde, for example, was seen as a bad influence who attacked “the moral, manly roots of English public life with the aid of effeminate, aristocratic tastes” (Frank Mort 89). Therefore non-homosexual men could perceive homosexuality as a threat to their identity; not only must they be suspicious of homosexual men as potential corrupters, but also avoid suspicion being cast in their own direction. While the Women's Rights movement can clearly be seen as an external threat to men's understanding of their own identity, homosexuality can be seen as a source of threat in itself, while homosexual men were simultaneously the recipients of external threats. Threats could be seen, in other words, as internal, external or both. The fact that threats could be so mutable is vital to the following discussion of the nature of the *fin de siècle* crisis in masculinity.

John Tosh and Michael Roper give us a clear exposition of the mechanics of the aforementioned identity crisis. First, we must understand that “masculinity has always been defined in relation to ‘the other’” (1); that is, by comparing and contrasting himself to those who are not men or not considered as manly as himself, a man may define his masculinity. Thus, a man's identity is not created in a vacuum; he must relate to others to know himself. This is arguably the universal human experience, but of course, also true of men living in the British *fin de siècle*. However, when a subject has power over the ‘other’ against whom it defines itself, that subject creates a hierarchy of definition. White², wealthy men have traditionally held power over women, non-white men, and less wealthy men; and at the British *fin de siècle*, this hierarchy was challenged. This means that the women's rights movement, the colonial uprisings, the homosexual panic and the scientific approach to the human mind, all forced men to re-evaluate themselves as much as their new ‘others’. If a woman is no longer what a man understands by ‘woman’, then he himself is no longer what he understands by ‘man’, and so on. If she is his equal in the workplace, is he then feminised or is she masculine? If Arab subjects can defeat a British officer, are they clever military strategists or savage beasts who might kill more British men? And if they are strategists, how can the British man justify treating them like inferiors who must be minded like livestock? If we see “men's power over women as an organizing principle of masculinity” (Roper and Tosh 2), what are we to make of the fact that women suddenly objected to that power? It is clear that if external pressures change, then men must also change. If “men's power in history has resided in their masculinity, as well as in their material privilege and their manipulation of law and custom” (8), then the *fin de siècle* saw a threat to men's power in all these respects. Men's political power and material privilege were being challenged, while the very definition of masculinity was problematised and debated – this particular problematisation is discussed more fully later in this

2 At the time, national identity was clearly demarcated, Anglo-Saxons being considered distinct from Welsh and other Celtic peoples, for example, and ‘Continental’ races. For a clear, brief discussion of this topic, see the Introduction to Filppula, Klemola and Pitkänen's *The Celtic Roots of English*.

introduction. It is easy to see how external influences could be perceived as threatening to men, both individually and collectively.

However, Showalter also suggests that “[a]nother way of understanding the crisis is to see it as generated from within and reflecting stresses and tensions in the rigid construction of masculine roles” (11). She further states, “[i]t is important to keep in mind that masculinity is no more natural, transparent, and unproblematic than ‘femininity’. It, too, is a socially constructed role, defined within particular cultural and historical circumstances” (8). This view is supported by Andrew Smith in *Victorian Demons* (2004), whose “principal argument is that the final decades of the nineteenth century provide a particularly complex set of examples of how the dominant masculine scripts came to be associated with disease, degeneration and perversity” (1). On the aforementioned experience of instability, he writes, “in part, this notion of crisis was staged within the dominant masculinist culture, rather than that this culture was thrown into crisis by external threats to it” (1). However easily some men might claim that their difficulties during this period lay in the challenges to their social, political and sexual hegemony, it is obvious that masculinity could easily be its own worst enemy. There was “a marked shift in the codes of manliness current among the governing and professional classes during the latter half of the nineteenth century” (Roper and Tosh 3), a shift which saw a change in what was permissible within the definition of ‘masculine’.

According to Frank Mort, the formation of new professions in medicine, public service and administration in the first half of the century created a wider gulf between genders as men became increasingly professionalised and women similarly domesticated (40). Simultaneously, women were entering new spheres, such as certain work places and the new shopping areas of London. This caused debate, because women were held to belong, traditionally, in the home. With the Victorian ‘angel of the house’ ideology combined with men's increasing engagement in the public sphere, it is reasonable to assume that men held a weaker position than previously in the home. This could have led to a narrowing-down of men's role in the home sphere, and a distancing of masculinity from domesticity. Effeminacy in men, to some degree permissible in previous times, was becoming inexcusable. Ruth Robbins notes that in earlier periods, manliness was defined in opposition to childhood, whereas during the *fin de siècle*, it became increasingly defined as the opposite of femininity (140).

Thus the threats to stability could be seen as both internal and external. For the purposes of this thesis, I acknowledge both views as valid, and draw on examples of both explanations. It is logical to assume that the situation men experienced at the *fin de siècle* was affected by both internal and external factors. Men perceiving external attacks on their identity, and men struggling with internal stresses to their gender roles, are the main subject of my readings and arguments. The

relevant issue is that men experienced a sort of crisis, and I shall hereafter assume that both external and internal factors contributed to this experience.

At this point it becomes necessary to clearly define what is meant by masculinity, by crisis, and for that matter, by identity. The much discussed identity crisis is not a specific event or moment in time, so it is difficult to pin down. Characterised by a feeling of something being imminent – something undesirable – it is the moment when the status quo is broken. It is that state of affairs where something must change or break, because times are difficult and insecure. When referring to ‘crisis’ in this thesis, unless otherwise specified, I mean the feeling invoked by the opening quotes: a sense of imminent, unwanted change. Thus, the crisis I refer to is that of men perceiving some fundamental challenge to their identity, and feeling uncertain of their situation because of it.

‘Identity’, on the other hand, is not quite as simple. When I write of men's identity, do I mean their individual or their group identity? Shall we consider them separately as persons, collectively as a gender, or halfway between, in terms of a specific social group or a subset of the population at large? And, without writing a ridiculously long book on psychology, how is one to define what identity is? To address the first question first, this thesis is concerned with a specific subset of a specific population – white, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon men living in England at the end of the eighteenth century. Most of the characters appearing in the texts with which I am concerned belong to this group. Their individual experiences are highly relevant, but are treated in this thesis as evidence of a broader trend, leading to further discussion of the male gender's experience as a whole. Naturally, that is not to claim that all men felt, thought and experienced things in the same way; but in this thesis, as I shall discuss further in the paragraphs on thesis statement and thesis outline, the main focus is the placing of individuals within a broader socio-historical context – just as I will show how two specific texts fit in with a general literary trend. In short, I discuss identity both as an individual and as a group characteristic, and which one I am in that paragraph concerned with will be clearly distinguished. As to what identity is, there could be dozens of valid definitions, from the strictly pragmatic – age, nationality, occupation, marital status – to the complex and existential, all depending on which field one works in. In this thesis, I briefly touch upon other aspects of identity, but my main focus is on the aforementioned crisis in masculinity. And so we come to the crux of the matter: masculinity as a basis for one's identity.

As Roper and Tosh point out, masculinity is “subject to change and varied in its forms” (1). The word meant something else two centuries ago than what it does today, and centuries before that, something else again. What is masculine, and how manliness differs from maleness, are central questions in this thesis. In this thesis, maleness is used to denote biological sex – a person born male and self-identifying as male. Manliness, on the other hand, is a difficult word to pin down, because

it involves an element of performance. A person whose sex is male is not necessarily considered, by themselves or their social group, to be masculine or manly; take for example 'drag queens', who perform what is traditionally considered femininity while still being male, and transsexual women, who are born male but who self-identify as female. Masculinity and manliness could be used interchangeably, as they sometimes are in Victorian fiction; certainly they are both used frequently in *Dracula* (the importance of which I discuss below). However, different connotations adhere to the two words; masculine sounds more clinical or academic, while manly – at least to this student – carries with it overtones of lumberjacks. As they are used interchangeably in the literature I discuss in this thesis, I also occasionally use them that way. They both, in one sense or the other, describe an aspect of the performance of gender: 'manly' and 'masculine' both describe a certain way of being, not a genetic code. So, the question one must ask oneself is: what is manly? What behaviour and characteristics, physical and/or psychological, define the identity of men? This is not simply subjective in that men create their own identity, but as discussed by Roper and Tosh, that they create it in relation to others. Social norms and ideals will weigh more heavily on the definition of masculinity than the individual's personal feelings on the subject. My object is not to define masculinity as a fixed set of traits, but to see how masculinity is treated in literature dealing with the *fin de siècle* crisis of male identity. Therefore, I am mainly concerned with masculinity as a set of social expectations; masculinity as I treat it here should be understood as what a man expects from himself based on what others expect from him. In short, masculinity is the ideal towards which a man either strives or is driven by social pressure, based on his being male.

With these terms more clearly defined, it is not unreasonable to claim that English men, as a group, felt their identity becoming unstable during this period. It is a gross oversimplification to say that masculinity had, previous to the *fin de siècle*, been a simple matter of biological sex, and that the arrival of New Women and homosexuals rendered it complex. However, we can safely say that by the end of this period, masculinity had irreversibly become an even more difficult concept. As Ruth Robbins puts it, “[a]t the end of the nineteenth century masculinity had become an unstable entity. Its dominance was under threat from both a *fin-de-siècle* sense of ending, and from the anxieties of definition which are the result of what Foucault calls ‘the multiplicity of discursive elements’” (137). In other words, it was no longer enough to possess a biological sex, one must also live up to socially constructed ideals of what manhood meant. Gender as a category of identity had decisively entered the stage; this was not new or unique to the nineteenth century, but the situation was intensified by new developments such as the Women's Rights movement and the Labouchère Amendment. These changing gender ideals, combined with the very real possibility of white, middle-class English men having to share the public sphere with marginalised groups, created an

experience of identity crisis for British men at the end of the nineteenth century.

Not unexpectedly, a literary reaction accompanied this crisis. Realism as a literary genre had enjoyed great success, as George Eliot and Charles Dickens could demonstrate, during the mid-Victorian period. Women writers were a large part of that success, with Eliot herself leading the field. By the end of the century, however, according to Showalter, the novel was dominated by men to the exclusion of women. Women, who had earlier been considered equally suited to writing as men, were now deemed a hindrance to good literature. Raymond Williams writes, “the importance of women novelists in the nineteenth century is well known and remarkable” (123). Elaine Showalter supports his claim: “It was a fact of mid-Victorian life that women novelists were both talented and successful” (16-17). However, over the course of the *fin de siècle* this seems to have changed, and by the turn of the century, women did not find their literary footing as easily as men. According to Margaret D. Stetz, the publishing system of the time “favoured men while disadvantaging women,” so that “[i]n the late-Victorian publishing house, no woman would ever feel completely at home” (128). Showalter asks, “Could it have been that after a century in which English women had shaped the novel, there was a twenty-year period in which no talented women appeared? Or was the male domination of the novel after 1880 an aspect of the crisis in masculinity that intensified sexual struggle?” (17). Her second question is, of course, rhetorical. She argues that one of the results of the male identity crisis during this period was the revival of an old literary genre with new trimmings:

The revival of “romance” in the 1880s was a men's literary revolution intended to reclaim the kingdom of the English novel for male writers, male readers, and men's stories. . . . Thus, in place of the heterosexual romance of courtship, manners, and marriage that had been the specialty of women writers, male critics and novelists extolled the masculine and homosocial “romance” of adventure and quest, descended from Arthurian epic. (79)

This new, or perhaps merely newly returned, genre is what Showalter calls *male quest romance*. Its main characteristic is its androcentricity; male quest romances are stories of men having adventures, with the authors and implied readers³ also being men. Women are largely narratively unimportant in that they have no direct impact on the plot, are absent, or occasionally are antagonists. In stories such as Rider Haggard's *She* (1886), the male protagonists are openly misogynist and the only woman of note is Ayesha, the beautiful but cruel goddess who must be defeated before the protagonists can have their happy ending. In *The Jewel of Seven Stars* (1903), Bram Stoker lets one

3 ‘Implied reader’ here means the audience for whom the author was intentionally writing, “the collective readership of a period” (Rimmon-Kenan 120). This is only one possible definition of ‘implied reader’; for a more detailed definition and treatment of narrative roles, see *Narrative Fiction* by Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan.

of his male protagonists state that “a strong man's natural impulse [is] to learn from a man rather than a woman” (qtd. in David Glover 89). In “The Man Who Would Be King” (1888) by Rudyard Kipling, it is eventually the protagonist's insistence upon marriage that ruins him; the young native girl exposes him as a mere mortal and he is decapitated. These are literary spaces for men, not for women, and in several cases, the authors are clearly either disinterested in or look with distaste on the inclusion of women in their narratives – women are simply not necessary to create male quest romance stories.

Other similarities between these stories is that they are fantastic rather than realistic, exotic rather than mundane, and that the plot is central – as Showalter states, manners and marriage have been replaced by quest and adventure. The most important aspect of the male quest romance is not the psychological development of the protagonist, or the relationships between characters – who gets married to whom, whose grudge is a long-standing family feud and so on. What matters is telling a good, exciting story. Secondly, how the characters behave in the narrative is central; what Rimmon-Kenan calls “indirect presentation” of a literary character's, well, character. She lists action, speech, external appearance and environment as ways in which the text “displays and exemplifies” a character trait (61). This genre is thus concerned with what the characters do and say, as well as how they look and where they are, but only insofar as it furthers the main plot of the text. The men are usually heroic, loyal, strong and dedicated. There may be villains and women, but after the Arthurian model, the knights are the main attraction, not Guinevere or the scullery maids. We could summarise that this genre consists of exciting stories of heroic men, doing adventurous things in exotic places in the company of other men. True, the plot may be read in a Freudian light and taken to signify an internal journey – just as the Gothic “externalizes ... conflicts that are usually seen as internal” (Eve Sedgwick 97) – but like most fantastic literature, male quest romance can be read purely for the plot and still make sense, if you will. We may compare it to *The Lord of the Rings*, which has itself many traits characteristic of the male quest romance⁴: while it is rewarding to read it as a parable of the Second World War, it is still widely read by young adults purely for the adventure. Texts belonging to this genre are usually also fast-paced; long, dreamy descriptions of how the brown fog of London resembles dinosaurs have no place in male quest romances.

So far, I have briefly discussed parts of the social situation at a given historical period, and one of the literary responses to that situation. To illustrate this discussion in detail, and to test the validity of certain theories, we now turn to specific works of the period; to examples of the male quest romance genre. This thesis posits that male quest romances were a literary reaction to increasing male anxiety during the British *fin de siècle*, and that both the texts discussed below

4 Among other things, the intensely homosocial milieus, the otherworldly setting, and an evil, immortal antagonist.

belong to this specific group of texts. Through analyses of these two texts, I shall demonstrate how the study of literature may be used to approach the construction and deconstruction of masculinity in a wider cultural context. Most importantly, the very fact that masculinity is explored as a threatened identity in this literary genre, suggests that masculinity itself is far more problematic than it is sometimes given credit for being.

The Sign of the Four (1890) by Arthur Conan Doyle and *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker were, at the time of publication, both very popular works; the first a detective story featuring the great Sherlock Holmes, the second arguably the reason vampires are still a popular theme in literature and film. Finding in these two texts material for close readings and analyses, I hope to do two things: first, to show that they both belong to the male quest romance genre, and second, to expand on and test Elaine Showalter's discussion of a male literary response to the male crisis of identity taking place during the British *fin de siècle*. In demonstrating that these two novels are male quest romances, I argue that this genre frames some of our most culturally significant texts, for both Sherlock Holmes and *Dracula* are still hugely popular today – unlike many texts which are now largely forgotten. This popularity shows that literary approaches to male anxiety are as current as ever. I discuss to what extent the male quest romance genre, as exemplified by *The Sign* and *Dracula*, is androcentric; whether it excludes women or can be seen as misogynist – or both. I hope to show that the spaces created in this literature, be they androcentric or not, allow male writers and readers to treat their fears and concerns openly; specifically, fears about women, about sexuality and about mental illness. And by demonstrating how these fears are major themes in the two texts mentioned, I suggest that some of the most popular literature of the period deals specifically with male anxiety, leading us to wonder whether enough attention has truly been given to masculinity as equally problematic to femininity.

Selection and method

In choosing to read *Dracula* and *The Sign of the Four* as examples of the same genre, I am also choosing to read them somewhat unorthodoxly. As I show in the introductory section to each chapter, each text can easily be located in other genres; Arthur Conan Doyle is arguably a founding father of the crime fiction genre, and *Dracula* is in many respects a Gothic horror novel. However, to read them in light of another genre entirely, while still remaining aware of their detective or Gothic characteristics, allows for a further diversity in meaning. That is to say, to read them in a different genre is to find other layers of meaning, and these new layers together with the familiar ones of already established genres open the texts up even further. As already mentioned, few literary productions of the *fin de siècle* are as widely read or as well known as the vampire Count and the

deducing sleuth, while many examples of the male quest romance are virtually unknown outside Victorianist literary circles. Perhaps it is this very blending of genres – narratives which move between different frameworks – that has allowed *The Sign* and *Dracula* to remain so popular. However, it is undeniable that if such popular works can be shown to belong to the male quest romance, then it follows that that genre appeals to a modern audience as much as it did to a late-Victorian one. Perhaps the genre is not as temporally limited as Showalter indicates; it was perhaps not a trend belonging specifically to the *fin de siècle*. Male anxiety is certainly not eradicated, so why should its literature not still flourish?

It may also be noted that while I claim to be using two primary texts, this thesis attempts to draw on the entire Holmes canon rather than only *The Sign of the Four*. The reason for this is that the Holmes stories are not as prominent in the reader's mind as the detective himself. Sherlock Holmes is a cult figure; the pipe and deerstalker are more familiar to us than any specific mystery Holmes has solved. Therefore, while *The Sign* is the basis for the main bulk of the chapter treating Sherlock Holmes, I give frequent references to other Holmes stories to elaborate and strengthen my arguments, and also to show that this novel is not an exception, but rather one in a group of stylistically and narratively related works. Certain textual trends or tendencies are dependent on a chronological reading of the Holmes canon in its entirety, as I make clear in the first chapter of this thesis. Furthermore, it may surprise readers to see that I have used the Wordsworth Classics editions of the Sherlock Holmes stories. These are not academic. The explanation for this is simple: there are no academic versions of Arthur Conan Doyle's most famous creations available. One might find an annotated edition, but no scholarly ones. There is also surprisingly little academic work done on the Holmes canon compared to *Dracula*. I discuss this further in the first chapter, but many of the articles and books on Sherlock Holmes seem to be written by people with a personal interest in the stories rather than academic credentials. This state of affairs indicates that Sherlock Holmes has burrowed far deeper into the popular psyche than in the academic one, and that there is a great deal of unexplored potential for literary research here.

On a related note, this thesis does not, to any great degree, attempt to explore how the themes of race and empire occur in the novels under discussion. The reason for this is simply that this topic has been explored in ways ranging from an intersection of post-colonial and queer theory (Murat Aydemir 2011), to biographical notes on how Stoker appears to have been friendly with Richard Burton, who revived the Blood Libel against European Jews (Judith Halberstam 248). In short, there is far more potential for uncovering new aspects of meaning on other themes, such as those I have selected here: feminism or the Woman Question, mental illness, and sexuality. The main focus is, of course, on how these topics influence men in the texts, and how the texts treat

them in relation to male characters and men as a gender.

I also find it necessary at this point to outline some of the theory on which I draw most frequently, so that before any analysis is undertaken, the reader will be clear on certain concepts and terms. Elaine Showalter and her views on the *fin de siècle* will naturally dominate, as they provide the starting point of this thesis. However, it is also important to note at this point that she is not the only critic who writes of that genre. Nicholas Ruddick, in “The fantastic fiction of the fin de siècle,” writes that “contemporary critics noted a revival of *romance*, namely fiction containing magical, supernatural and other non-realistic elements” (189). Although he stresses magical or supernatural elements, he later states that such fantastic fiction can also be defined as “any sort of departure from ‘consensus reality’” (189), and I argue, in the opening paragraphs of chapter 1, that even *The Sign of the Four* can be read as such a departure. Richard Kaye, in “Sexual identity at the fin de siècle”, briefly mentions “late-Victorian male-bonding narratives”, of which the atavistically aggressive female was a staple feature (56); though he uses a different terminology, it is clear that Kaye is referring to the same group of texts as Showalter. In fact, he makes explicit reference to *She*, that perfect and much-discussed example of the male quest romance genre.

Concerning literary gender theory, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick is important to the arguments made in this thesis. Her *Between Men* (1992) discusses relations and power systems wherein male bonds are central. She argues, supported by a brief overview of feminist theory, that homophobia and the suppression of women come from the same place: a system of “obligatory heterosexuality” (3). That is to say, the enforcing of heteronormativity – that the only socially sanctioned living arrangement is within heterosexual marriage – aims to place women and homosexual men below heterosexual men in a hierarchy. The reader will frequently come across the word “homosocial” and its derivatives, which is central to both the genre of male quest romance and my readings of the primary texts. ‘Male homosociality’ describes the social structures that govern relations between men, and thus, one could argue, masculinity. Homosociality is to be clearly distinguished from homosexuality, although Sedgwick argues that the line between the two is sometimes unclear (chapter 8); a homosocial bond is not the same as a homosexual one. In the latter, one may infer an element of romantic or erotic attraction; although the same may be said of the former, the importance is in the power structure. Additionally, I draw on her discussion of erotic triangles and what she calls the ‘traffic in women’, as well as her chapters on the Gothic as a literary genre. Regarding traffic in women, this indicates that men circulate women among themselves to create and cement male-male bonds (25-26). A very literal example of this traffic would be a father-in-law creating a bond to the husband by ‘giving away’ his daughter. However, Sedgwick argues that even when two men compete for the same woman – an erotic triangle – the bond between the men is also

strengthened, despite their rivalry (21-24). The triangle structure is also relevant to my application of the following theorist from whom I borrow certain arguments and expressions.

The literary tradition of romantic friendship fiction is centred on the idea of a close, platonic relationship between two members of the same sex, and texts belonging to this tradition were widely read in North America during the greater part of the nineteenth century. In *Manly Love*, Nils Axel Nissen recounts several of the most influential authors and texts, and discusses them in a historical context as well as a literary one. In this genre, erotic triangles were not necessarily competitive; several texts detail how the romantic friendship secures a romantic interest for either one or both of the protagonists. These texts, novels and short stories alike, are usually centred on the strong bond between two men, and sometimes explore alternatives to traditional domesticity. Nissen notes that in *Huck Finn*, for example, Huck and Jim create a domestic sphere alone on their raft. Romantic friendship fiction is a literature in which men may explore “what a man's life with a man might be like” (Nissen, *Romantic Friendship Reader* 9). This is the point at which that genre most strongly resembles the male quest romance; the androcentric nature of the narratives, and the space to explore alternatives to heterosexual domesticity, are similar in texts of both genres. The intense bonds between men, sometimes expressed in nearly homoerotic admiration for the other man, is also a common trait; this I return to in my discussion of *Dracula* in particular. Nissen's work on romantic friendship fiction serves to illustrate some of my own arguments about male quest romance.

The justification for applying Nissen's arguments about American society and literature to British conditions, rests on the historian Janet Oppenheim and her “*Shattered Nerves*”: *Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England* (1991). Her descriptions of the developments in masculinity during the nineteenth century closely resemble, in the most important aspects, those of American society provided by Nissen. Oppenheim writes of the first half of the century in Britain that “[p]assionate attachments between boys, and even close relations between masters and students, were condoned” (146). Nissen, on the same period, states that American men “could feel and openly express an unashamed, unselfconscious, all-consuming love for members of their own sex ... without being considered effeminate, unnatural, or perverse” (*Romantic Friendship Reader* 4). This aspect of masculinity changed over time, and “by the turn of the century, these highly sentimental attachments were no longer acceptable to late Victorian concepts of manliness, and the fact that they raised suspicions of homosexuality was not the least of the reasons why” (Oppenheim 175). Again we may compare the British state of things with Nissen's notes on the American situation: “in the last third of the 1800s, romantic friendship between men was beginning to be threatened ... by the increasing suspicion that passionate friendships between men might be less

than platonic” (*Romantic Friendship Reader* 10). So in addition to a certain cultural similarity of language and history, the experience of American and British men seems to be similar in at least one important respect. If further argument is needed to apply Nissen's American literary theory to a British context, I will simply state that the many similarities between romantic friendship fiction and male quest romances suggest not only that the two genres are similar, but considering that one died out just as the other gained popularity, the latter might actually be a development or continuation of the former.

Lastly, the reader will note that I have not given a specific time frame for the *fin de siècle*; this is for the simple reason that historical periods do not necessarily have temporal limits which are universally acknowledged. Although the meaning, ‘end of the century’, indicates a measurement in years, the interesting thing about this period in English cultural history is not when it happened, but how it felt to those who experienced it. “The Victorian *fin de siècle* was an epoch of endings and beginnings. The collision between the old and the new that characterized the turn of the century marks it as an excitingly volatile and transitional period ... a time fraught with anxiety and with an exhilarating sense of possibility” (Ledger and Luckhurst xiii). It is that sense of the end of an era I am interested in, rather than the exact years this sense occupied. Both Ledger and Luckhurst (*The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History c. 1880-1900*) and Showalter (*Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*) include the 1880s in their treatments of the period, while the Cambridge Companion (edited by Gail Marshall) refers repeatedly to the 1890s in the introduction and on the cover. Are we to assume that the period commences in 1880, or 1890? Cultural and historical developments are rarely that compliant with regards to dates. Historically, it is not sound to assume that the period ended at the stroke of midnight as the calendar shifted to 1 January 1900, either; the sense of endings and multiplicity is likely to have carried over some years into the new century, just as the laws and conventions of the nineteenth century lingered for years, decades, even another century. In short, we shall assume that the *fin de siècle* is a wider period than the 1890s, and that the meaning of the phrase has to do with a social and cultural setting rather than a specific temporal space. Where relevant, I discuss the specific time span in relation to my analysis of the texts. I also use English and British interchangeably unless otherwise indicated, mainly for variety, but also to indicate that the other parts of the British Isles – Ireland, Scotland, Wales – were considered culturally and politically subordinate to England at the time, and are frequently included in the nomenclature of “British” without sufficiently allowing for their regional individuality⁵.

5 The Celtic languages, for example, were at this time nearly extinct, and the ‘Celtic races’, as mentioned in footnote 2, were considered inferior in many ways to the Anglo-Saxon-identified population. Again, see Filppula et al.

1. Sherlock Holmes: Defending Unconventional Masculinity

The Sherlock Holmes stories undoubtedly belong among the world's most famous crime fiction. New adaptations appear frequently, in every media from Japanese graphic novels to television shows where Watson is female⁶. However, the original stories – the Holmes canon – have not lost their popularity, and are still available in several editions from different publishing houses. The basic structure of the stories is fairly formulaic with few variations: Watson presents Holmes to the reader, a client arrives and states their case, Holmes investigates, and the criminal is revealed, normally with some measure of clever commentary from the protagonists. The short stories and novels are all detective stories in the sense that the main character is a detective, and that the stories are mainly concerned with his crime solving. And as mentioned in the introduction, the title character seems to be more famous than the plot of most of the stories, and so I attempt to draw on the entire Holmes canon in order to argue my points, rather than just one story. The main focus of my reading, however, is Doyle's *The Sign of the Four* (1890), for several reasons. First, because this is a novel rather than a short story; I am comparing two texts, and I would argue that choosing two texts of the same form simplifies matters. A short story and a novel will, by definition, have very different traits, and the emphasis of my discussion is on content, not form. Second, the characters have developed somewhat from the first Holmes novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, and some interesting traits have been brought to light, such as Holmes' drug habit and Watson's romantic interest in women. These traits bring a new level of complexity to the novel; not only to the protagonists, but also to the narrative. Third, in some respects, *The Sign* marks a break with the Holmes canon; there are aspects of both narrative and characters which are so different from those we find in other Holmes stories that the discrepancy suggests a sort of crisis. The most prominent, of course, is Watson's marriage, which is discussed in detail in sections 1.1 and 1.2.

Despite clearly belonging to the genre of detective fiction, *The Sign of the Four* also shows distinct characteristics of another genre, one that flourished during the British *fin de siècle*: the male quest romance. As mentioned in the introduction, tales such as *Her*, *The Jewel of Seven Stars* and “The Man Who Would be King” create a world in which men, unhindered and unencumbered by women (or occasionally hounded by them), strike out and travel to exotic places to solve a mystery, defeat a goddess or lift a curse. Typical traits of this genre are exotic elements such as characters or locations outside the ‘civilised’ West, a pair or group of men working together and promoting each others' interests, and a homosocial focus created by the absence or near absence of women. In short,

⁶ The Japanese doujinshi are usually fan produced and focus heavily on a possibly homoerotic relationship between Holmes and Watson. The TV series *Elementary* (2012) stars Lucy Liu as Watson.

these are stories about men doing exciting things with other men in places where culture and civilisation are secondary to the exotic – where instincts and natural urges are allowed to take precedence over rules and norms. By exotic I mean that which is foreign to British society at the time, both rural and urban; elements out of place in an ordered England, such as artefacts, animals, people or customs from other parts of the world, or supernatural elements. I demonstrate that such genre-defining traits are clearly present in *The Sign*, and that the narrative is structured around homosocial bonds rather than heterosocial ones, thus justifying a reading of the second Sherlock Holmes novel as a male quest romance.

To show that the Holmes stories are androcentric, I would argue that one has only to consider the characters. Watson narrates and Holmes investigates, and the stories are always – with two exceptions, in which Holmes tells his own story – centred around these two men. There are other characters with recurring roles, such as Inspector Lestrade and Mrs Hudson, but the only person who must actually be present in order to make a Holmes story, is Holmes. We see the proof of this when he solves crimes without even Watson's presence in “The Lion's Mane” and “The Blanched Soldier”, both published in 1926. In general, however, Holmes and Watson are at the centre of the narrative. As for the exotic aspects, the Agra treasure ensures the presence of an Oriental mood, as do the frequent allusions to the Andaman Islands and the presence of Indian domestic servants. Even London seems strange and otherworldly at times; a giant throwing its “monster tentacles” out into the country (*The Sign* 124), or a “howling desert of South London” with only Thaddeus Sholto's little oasis of art to relieve the gloom (125). Indeed, as Watson tells us, there is even big game to hunt: “I have coursed many creatures ... but never did sport give me such a wild thrill as this mad, flying manhunt down the Thames” (178). In fact, the characters in the novel explain it very well: “‘It is a romance!’ cried Mrs Forrester. ‘An injured lady, half a million in treasure, a black cannibal and a wooden-legged ruffian. They take the place of the conventional dragon or wicked earl.’ ‘And two knight-errants to the rescue,’ added Miss Morstan” (165).

Thus, while certainly qualifying as a detective novel, *The Sign of the Four* is also a story of exotic adventure in which only men may participate. Though arguments may be made that it is not ‘purely’ a male quest romance, *The Sign of the Four* certainly contains strong elements of that genre, and it is precisely those elements that suggest a literary trend from which women were excluded. This particular kind of men's literature – of androcentric adventures – can be seen as a response or a reaction to the rising feminist movement of the *fin de siècle*, as a way for men to carve out a literary space where women were neither necessary nor welcome (Showalter 76-81). That space, however, is also one in which other male anxieties can be approached; anxieties about sexuality and mental illness, for example. This chapter explores the treatment of these specific

concerns in *The Sign of the Four*, in an attempt to test Showalter's discussion of the male quest romance. The ways in which the male characters, narrator and the author approach mental illness, sexuality and women in this novel, will shed some light on the function of this particular *fin de siècle* literary movement.

On that note, we must briefly touch upon the matter of narration and how this affects our reading of the novel. When comparing the Holmes canon to *Dracula*, for example, one of the most striking differences is the effect of one narrator versus a group of several, or what Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan calls “fixed ... and multiple focalization” (78). Watson is the sole narrator of the Holmes stories, save in the instances where Holmes narrates himself or is narrated by someone other than Watson⁷. Doctor Watson acts as a “narrator-focalizer” (75), whose narration of the story colours our perception of it. In comparison, *Dracula* is told by a group of narrators, and though the series of events they narrate is the same, their voices are clearly different. This narrative technique lends credibility to their utterances, because several people seem to agree – as readers, we have less reason to distrust the consensus among those narrator-focalisers. Watson, however, is our only source in his narratives, and so readers will perhaps question his utterances more closely than those of the group narrating *Dracula*. Such questioning, in turn, could influence our understanding of how certain themes are treated; it is useful to bear this in mind as we approach the text as a male quest romance rife with male anxiety.

1.1 Women, and the Lack Thereof, in the Sherlock Holmes Canon

Sherlock Holmes is introduced to a client, whose plight is all the worse because she is a woman, and this client presents her case. The great detective forms his hypothesis based on the available data, shows his unique talent for reasoning based on close observation, and after setbacks and obstacles are duly overcome, the crime is solved. All is revealed, everyone's honour is upheld, the criminals are either dead or imprisoned, and Holmes cracks a joke. It could be a step-by-step description of how a detective story is created, and if one had swapped Holmes for Miss Marple or Poirot, the outcome would have been much the same. The butler did it, in the library, with a candlestick. Certainly, *The Sign of the Four* is in a sense about a woman client and her problem, but Mary Morstan is only physically present in seven out of twelve chapters, and never at the scene of murder, or the boat chase, or even the final explanation of the crime. Watson is both narrator and focalizer, Holmes is the main character and the hero of the story, and the criminals are talked about far more frequently than Mary and her missing treasure. *The Sign* is mostly a story about two men

⁷ The two stories already mentioned as well as “The Mazarin Stone” and “His Last Bow”, narrated in the third person

chasing criminals, trying to solve a case, and interacting mainly with other men while they do it. As Ayesha was the driving force behind Holly and Leo's expedition in Haggard's *Her*, so Mary Morstan is the driving force behind Holmes and Watson's adventures. Unlike Ayesha, however, Mary is not an actor in the story beyond verbal participation. Miss Morstan actually spends large portions of the two days during which their adventure takes place, sitting at home, waiting for Watson to bring her news. And if we consider not only the contemporary gender roles, but also the characteristics of the male quest romance genre, why should she not?

In a male quest romance, if it follows the 'recipe', we can expect to find few women, and those few to be either insignificant or antagonistic at that. Of course that is something of an overstatement, but if we consider the genre's most prominent characteristic – its androcentricity – then it follows that in male quest romances, women are not expected to take centre stage. If they do, they are the atavistically aggressive female figures of Kaye's description. This, of course, is an aspect of male anxiety being explored; specifically, male anxiety relating to women. Therefore it would be rewarding to examine how women appear in *The Sign of the Four*. How the other characters perceive them, how they function in the narrative: these may serve as indications of how the text constructs women. Do women act here as a threat, a destabilising agent? Is this particular novel a literary space where men are free of women and their demands, or are women central to the narrative structure? In short, as real men were frequently concerned about women, are the literary men equally concerned, and how is this dealt with in the text?

A natural place to start such an investigation is with the female characters of the story, their functions in the narrative and the feelings they engender in both readers and male characters. First, we may note that there are five women mentioned by name in *The Sign*, all five of whom are allowed just enough speech and action for us to analyse their characters a little beyond the fact that they are female. There is Mary Morstan, of course, the client; there is Mrs Hudson, the landlady at Baker Street; Mrs. Smith, the wife of the Jewish boat owner Mordecai; Mrs Cecil Forrester, Mary's employer; and finally Mrs Bernstone, the Sholtos' housekeeper. Four married or widowed women and one young, unmarried lady. As to their characterisation, none of the women are criminals, but Holmes tells Watson of a murderess he once saw hanged (119). Thus, although the Sherlock Holmes canon includes several female lawbreakers or adversaries for the great detective, the women present in *The Sign* are all safely placed in the group of morally sound characters. Statistically, women are hardly frequent murderers or robbers, but they do occasionally figure as both thieves and killers in the Holmes canon, as I discuss further below. The point is that they are unremarkable; they are not criminals, which would have made them interesting and structurally important, nor are they heroes, aiding in the resolution of the conflict. Mrs Hudson objects to "dirty and ragged little street-Arabs"

(161) in her drawing room, but no complaint is ever laid against her by either Watson or Holmes; she appears to the reader as a landlady with good taste and manners, but her character is not explored more fully. Mrs Smith tells Holmes all he needs to know about the escape vessel, and that is the sum of her involvement; Mrs Bernstone is nearly hysterical at the sight of her dead master, and that is all *her* involvement. Mrs Forrester is kind and caring towards Mary Morstan; this we gather from Watson's description as he hands the client over to her friend after the events at Pondicherry Lodge. Comparing them, we find that these four women, even Mrs Hudson with her recurring presence in the Holmes canon, are slightly different but altogether mostly similar. I would argue that this similarity and relative insignificance stems from their being functions rather than fully developed characters.

Vladimir Propp argues in his *Morphology of the Folk Tale* (25-65) that fairy tales and folk tales contain functions rather than characters. A character function will not be credible or interesting beyond their specific task, which is one of seven clearly defined archetypes (or possibly a combination of two or more such types): the hero, the villain, the princess or prize, the dispatcher, the helper, the donor, and/or the false hero. In *Narrative Fiction*, Rimmon-Kenan applies Propp's theory to a general discussion of character; of whether any literary character is in fact more than an action (34-36). She proposes that instead of dismissing one in favour of the other, we ought to consider character and action “as relative to types of narrative rather than as absolute hierarchies” (36); in fairy tales a character is frequently nothing more than an action or function, while in modern novels the character is sometimes far more person than action. Take for example Albert Camus' *The Stranger* (1942), in which very little happens until the murder, and yet we gain immense insight into the protagonist's inner life. Following Rimmon-Kenan's argument, I would suggest that when it comes to woman characters, *The Sign* follows the fairy tale model. Women characters in *The Sign* all seem to fit the same type; they are donors, the people who provide Holmes with what he needs – be it information or kippers for breakfast – and then are not heard from again within this story's narrative. Mrs Hudson, of course, is a recurrent role, but her function is the same in all the Holmes stories: she provides breakfast and shelter, and occasionally complains of clients who are too rude to wait until they are properly invited in. These women's character is limited to and defined by their action.

Now, it would be easy to read these flat and unimportant women as indications that the author has no interest in creating rounded woman characters, perhaps because he feels they have no significance within his story. However, one thing turns this argument around: the men are equally flat and functional rather than interesting and human. The policemen, the boat owner, the Baker Street Irregulars, even the Indian domestic servants; they all serve the main purpose of aiding

Holmes or adding to the mood of the text, and nothing else. They do not even always have names. I would argue that, in such a short novel of a genre mainly concerned with plot rather than characters' development, flat characters act as much a part of the scenery as the buildings and carriages. They are mere plot devices. They are unimportant, but this has nothing to do with their sex or gender; the four married women in *The Sign* cannot offer us much more material for a gender-oriented reading than the fact that they are all rather decent people. They tell us next to nothing of woman-related anxiety in the male quest romance. We must turn to Mary Morstan, as well as other women from the Holmes canon, to explore how women are approached in that genre.

Mary Morstan: one of very few women ready to accept a marriage proposal after having known the man for only two days – and barely that. In the afternoon of the first day, she presents her case to Holmes and Watson, and late in the evening on the second day, she accepts Watson as a prospective husband. Despite the narrative being a very condensed and fast-paced one, as befits a quest romance, one cannot help but be a little surprised at the speed with which Watson finds, woos and proposes to the lady. There is something Shakespearean about it, and yet these are not Italian teenagers of feuding families, but respectable members of London society. However, Watson assures us that “this one day of strange experiences” has taught him to know “her sweet, brave nature” (*The Sign* 146) in a way that years of mundane daily life could not. And if we are to believe Watson – who, being the narrator, has a certain influence over our opinion – her nature or personality is just what makes him love her. She is, by his account, the perfect model of conventional Victorian womanhood: blonde, small and dainty, with perfect taste in dress; furthermore she is gentle, spiritual and sympathetic (116). Despite being reticent where women are concerned, Holmes actually allows that she is a “model client” (119), having carefully kept all the correspondence and valuable clues for his perusal. Even the Sholtos' housekeeper instantly draws “womanly comfort” from Mary's mere presence at the scene of the murder: “‘God bless your sweet, calm face!’ she cried with an hysterical sob.” (136). Watson continually praises Mary's sweetness, her beauty, her bravery and her womanly grace – he even appreciates her age; twenty-seven is, to him, preferable to a tenderer youth. With the acceptance of his marriage proposal, Watson grows positively poetic: now that the “golden barrier” of her would-be wealth between them is gone, he has found happiness: “Whoever had lost a treasure, I knew that night that I had gained one.” (184)

I think we can safely state that Mary Morstan is not an atavistically aggressive female, nor do the protagonists have anything but praise for her. Certainly the treatment of women in *The Sign* is not similar to the way the protagonist, Holly, of Haggard's *Her* is deeply sceptical of all women and takes pains to bring his foster son up with absolutely no female influence. Mary Morstan, being the perfect woman, is a treasure worth fighting for; Watson's happiness depends upon her. As a

client, she is important to the narrative structure of the novel; she dispatches Holmes and Watson on an errand that turns into a murder plot. And although Holmes bemoans his friend's upcoming nuptials because love is illogical, and insists that “[w]omen are never to be entirely trusted – not the best of them” (165), Watson lets us know that he – and the reader – know Holmes to be absurd. “I did not pause to argue over this atrocious sentiment”, he tells us; no, he does not even bother to argue, because we can share in his conviction that it is not true. Watson likes ladies – he likes them so much that his “experience of [them] extends over many nations and three separate continents” (116), although he has not mentioned any women of his personal acquaintance in the previous Holmes novel – and he loves Mary. So although Holmes himself may be an outspoken misogynist, Watson, who is after all far more representative of the middle-class Victorian man than the detective, assures us that women are quite all right. And even Holmes strongly admires Irene Adler, the only woman he cares about, who “eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex” (*Adventures* 3) after having bested him at his own game. In conclusion, women can be seen as central to the plot and highly appreciated by the male characters. If anxiety about the Woman Question is a theme in this novel, it is very deeply buried.

Turning the facts around, however, an argument could be made that even Mary Morstan, despite all Watson's continual praise, is reducible to a damsel in distress whose main importance is to be Watson's love interest. Thaddeus Sholto could just as well have contacted Holmes about the murder and the treasure; Mary's advantage is that she is an angelic woman, but that does not make her an integral part of the plot. Sherlock Holmes' clients are as numerous as his cases, and they all perform the same action: they are dispatchers in Propp's character function scheme, the character who incites the hero Holmes to commence his quest. Mary does not participate in the search for the murderer or the treasure; Watson takes her home, and there she remains until he returns to her with news. In one way, *The Sign of the Four* is a typical male quest romance: a woman needs help, which sets the stage for manly heroics; at the end, the hero marries the woman who needed help. Further participation on her part is not necessary.

And yet, even Holmes acknowledges that Mary is admirably well suited for detective work: she keeps important clues and is ready to furnish the detective with all the facts at his demand. In this way, she also functions as helper. This is very similar to the development of Mina Harker, the most prominent woman character in *Dracula*. These women both hold several functions, notably those of helper and princess/prize. A woman character who acts as dispatcher, helper and prize does not immediately seem to be unimportant; in fact, a great deal of the narrative seems to hinge upon her. The interesting thing, though, is that although Mina is the administrator of the hunt for Count Dracula, and although Mary has provided Holmes both with evidence to solve the case and the

incentive he needs to resist his drug habit, neither woman actively participates in the resolution of the conflict. Mina follows the men as they hunt the vampire, but does not participate in the physical work. Mary knows that a murder has been committed, but does not attempt to assist Holmes in forming theories, despite the fact that she knows exactly which clues he will want and brings them to him. Most strikingly, women do not intrude in masculine areas; they are helpers, but not heroes. Both Mina and Mary remain in the sphere of the home for the greater part of the narratives. Mary, despite her mental faculties, does not compete with Holmes in his field; nor does she attempt to join in the hunt or assist the detective, which is Watson's field. The significant fact is that Mary does not venture into male territory; she remains within the boundaries set for her by her gender.

In fact, very few of the women characters in the Holmes canon challenge certain sets of Victorian gender roles. They will lie, kill and steal, but they will not wear trousers and they will not become doctors⁸. There is the fierce maid Theresa who will lie to the police and abet criminals in service of her mistress, whom she loves dearly (“The Abbey Grange”). The mistress herself, for that matter, finds that “this English life, with its proprieties and its primness, is not congenial” to her (*Return* 257), but then she is married to a drunkard, and no lady would happily endure that. Instead of a divorce, however, she conceals her lover's guilt when he kills the brutish husband. There is, of course, Irene Adler, whose career includes a number of wealthy and powerful lovers, and whose disguise not even Sherlock Holmes can see through. She is, and even Holmes admits this, “a lovely woman, with a face that a man might die for” (*Adventures* 15). She is also so clever that she is beyond the reach of the law. And yet, Irene Adler only risks encountering Sherlock in order to marry her lover and flee with him to Europe, and even Mary Morstan disappears unceremoniously out of the Holmes canon. Between her marriage and her death, she has some brief appearances in her and Watson's house, from which she gladly sends Watson off on manly adventures with Holmes while she stays at home and knits. In short, though Watson praises women for their beauty and their fine spirits, the most frequently seen woman in the entire canon is Mrs Hudson – and she is mentioned more often than she speaks herself. Women are conventional and largely absent; they are victims of skulduggery, or they fear for their husbands, but they never traipse the field alongside Holmes and Watson. Nor do they understand politics (Lady Hilda, “The Second Stain”), or insist on being given the vote, or demand divorces. They might kill their husbands, of course, or aid their lover to do so, as in “The Abbey Grange”, but even then only when driven to it by abusive spouses.

The Holmes canon does not portray hostility to women; rather, it insistently glorifies and extols the traditional virtues considered feminine during the late-Victorian period, such as humility,

⁸ The exception, of course, is Irene Adler; Holmes indicates that she is unique, and so we may hesitate to take her as representative of women in the Holmes canon.

gentleness, beauty, care of others, and helpfulness. Women are usually comforting graces in the houses of their husbands or fathers, and there they must be kept safe. Holmes even once threatens to horsewhip a man down the stairs because his injured lady client has no male relatives to do it for her (“A Case of Identity”). Women, being unable to fend for themselves, must be protected at all costs, and as Holmes himself puts it: “Surely a gentleman should not lay much stress upon [personal risk] when a lady is in most desperate need of his help?” (*Return* 157). The point of this is that though *The Sign* is not lacking in women, or in men willing to die for them, men are not in any way encumbered by women. No women demand an equal share of power; no women challenge the masculine hegemony. Male anxiety about the Woman Question is dealt with fairly simply: by absolutely refusing to entertain any female participation in the masculine sphere. The text demonstrates a feminine ideal that is a comfort and a reward to men, and subsequently holds it up as a shining example to all womanhood. Mary is perfect – to Watson. Any alternative femininity, such as the Suffragettes or the advocates of free unions, is left out. Of course, one could argue that women's debates have no place in androcentric adventures, and that the text simply ignores them because they are irrelevant. However, that argument is weakened when we consider that all the women characters of *The Sign* are fairly similar, and that their actions are limited to one thing: helping Holmes. The inclusion of a certain type of femininity, and the exclusion of all other types, is at least suggestive.

1.2 Watson's Crisis of Sexuality

Watson's love interest, despite filling up large parts of *The Sign of the Four*, seems to be restricted to this one novel. Mary only speaks twice more in the entire Holmes canon (“The Man With the Twisted Lip” and “The Boscombe Valley Mystery”), and is generally barely mentioned as Watson “rushed upstairs to explain the matter” (*Memoirs* 323) to her before he goes out with Holmes. This sudden disappearance surely suggests that Conan Doyle never intended her to be a permanent character in his works; she is occasionally mentioned, but never brought into contact with Holmes and his professional work, nor do we get any serious insights into her and Watson's home life. She reminds one of Watson's old bullet wound; it is part of his character, but never truly relevant to the plot or his relationship to other characters, save that they might both keep Watson at home when the weather is bad. Mary Morstan is introduced, married, and forgotten, and after she dies in an unspecified manner, Watson never marries again. In fact, he moves back in with Holmes as soon as the detective comes back from the dead. Watson never speaks of an attraction to women again, except to note that their clients are occasionally pretty or well dressed, and so his sexuality seems to

live and die with his relationship to Mary. His sudden lack of interest seems a little incongruous with what we find when we read further into the Holmes canon and encounter Holmes' flattering description of Watson's luck with the ladies:

With your natural advantages, Watson, every lady is your helper and accomplice. What about the girl at the post office, or the wife of the greengrocer? I can picture you whispering soft nothings with the young lady at the Blue Anchor, and receiving hard somethings in exchange (*Casebook* 220).

So Watson, with his three continents' worth of experience, is a natural Don Juan; and yet, after Mary dies, he remains unmarried – at least, no mention is made of a second spouse – for all the rest of the Holmes canon. In addition, Watson's sudden love affair with Mary, culminating in an engagement after two days, seems *extremely* sudden when one compares *The Sign* with the first Holmes novel; *A Study in Scarlet*.

Although the murder plot is motivated by a woman, neither Holmes nor Watson seem at all interested in women in *A Study in Scarlet*, perhaps because there are no women there for them to be interested in, or perhaps because women do not seem at all necessary to the unravelling of a murder mystery. Watson does not exclaim at the beauty of any girls they happen to meet, Holmes does not make misogynist comments, and the half of the novel in which our heroes both feature is virtually devoid of female characters at all, save the introduction of Mrs Hudson, the landlady. Watson, as narrator, focuses on telling us all about Holmes and his remarkable faculties, or on detailing the crimes committed and the victims thereof. Indeed, Watson at first seems a little obsessed with his new flatmate: “I eagerly hailed the little mystery which hung around my companion, and spent much of my time in endeavouring to unravel it” (*Study* 11). He makes lists of Holmes' accomplishments, studies his habits, and attempts to “break through the reticence which he showed on all that concerned himself” (11). When Holmes shows his skills at brain work, Watson praises him enthusiastically and Holmes, in turn, flushes with pleasure. Watson actually likens Holmes to a woman in this respect: “he was as sensitive to flattery on the score of his art as any girl could be on that of her beauty” (29). In the first Holmes novel, Watson admires Holmes and nobody else, and the homosocial bonds between them are formed and strengthened in a setting without women. Then, rather suddenly and very effusively, from one novel to another, Watson becomes a ladies' man with worldly experience (three continents' worth, at that) and falls hopelessly in love with Mary Morstan in less than forty-eight hours. By effusive I here mean that the style of his language changes; that the way in which Watson speaks of Mary is more loaded with feeling and far more detailed than the style with which he has described other characters so far. Compare, for example, the following two passages; the first is Watson's first proper description of Sherlock Holmes, and the second describes

his thoughts on Mary Morstan.

In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing, save during those intervals of torpor to which I have alluded; and his thin, hawklike nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination (*A Study in Scarlet* 10-11).

She was seated by the open window, dressed in some sort of white diaphanous material ... The soft light of a shaded lamp fell upon her as she leaned back in the basket chair, playing over her sweet, grave face, and tinting with a dull, metallic sparkle the rich coils of her luxuriant hair. ... her whole pose and figure spoke of an absorbing melancholy (*The Sign of the Four* 182).

Notice how, where Holmes is described in relatively plain detail, Mary warrants adjectives such as “rich”, “luxuriant”, “soft” and “absorbing”. In short, Mary causes Watson's language to become somewhat flowery. In the first novel, the only portrayal of sexuality is that of the murderer, when he kills men to avenge the woman he loved. In the second, Watson has become a poet: “It was selfish, no doubt, disloyal, wrong, but I could realise nothing save that the golden barrier was gone from between us” (*The Sign* 184). The shift in the portrayal of sexuality from *Study* to *The Sign* is sudden and thought-provoking. It is as if Watson experiences a crisis of sexuality.

Holmes, on the other hand, displays no overt sexuality at all; if we were applying a modern terminology of sex, we might be tempted to use the word ‘asexual’ to describe him. Take, for example, his brief acquaintance with Irene Adler:

To Sherlock Holmes she is always *the* woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. ... It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen ... (“A Scandal in Bohemia” 3).

Although Irene Adler “eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex” in Holmes' eyes (3), he harbours no romantic feelings for her. Even this most important woman does not awaken in him the ‘tender passions’; Holmes remains unaffected – although not completely disinterested, for he insists on retaining her photograph at the end of the case. Watson ends the story on the following note: “[a]nd when [Holmes] speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honourable title of *the* woman” (25). It is clear that Miss Adler is the only woman Holmes has any sort of feelings for, but the great detective tells Watson decisively: “I have never loved” (*His Last Bow* 400). The introduction to “A Scandal in Bohemia” is not the only instance of Watson likening Holmes to “an automaton – a calculating machine” (*The Sign* 119); the good doctor is

aware that his friend does not look at women the way other men do, nor even at people in general. Watson actually expresses disappointment when Holmes fails to show any romantic interest in one of his lady clients “when once she had ceased to be the centre of one of his problems” (*Adventures* 273), although Holmes has shown no more interest in this client than in any other – the detective neither speaks of her appearance or her character in any way save to praise her bravery as he asks her to lock a maid in the cellar. When reading this particular Holmes tale, it may be surprising to the reader to suddenly find, in the very last paragraph, that Watson's hopes for Holmes' love life were hinging on Miss Violet Hunter, especially considering that the only other woman Holmes has ever shown any interest in was Irene Adler, and that we are told plainly that Holmes did not love her. Consider also the following exchange between the two men from “Charles Augustus Milverton”:
“‘You would not call me a marrying man, Watson?’ ‘No, indeed!’” (156). Although Watson seems ambivalent – he realises that Holmes is not a marrying man, and yet he had hoped that Violet Hunter would interest his friend – Holmes seems rather clear: he has no real interest in women or in marriage.

This is precisely what renders him – and by extension, Watson – vulnerable to what Eve Sedgwick calls “homophobic blackmail” (90). According to Sedgwick, there occurred “an increasingly stressed and invasive homophobic division of the male homosocial spectrum” during the nineteenth century, especially during the last quarter of it. Regulation of sexuality and sex behaviour was transferred from religious institutions to a secular complex including medicine and the law (134). These are some of the “mechanics ... by which nonhomosexual-identified men were subject to control through homophobic blackmailability” (90). In other words, as sexuality became clearly demarcated from social relations, relations among men changed, and men became subject to a new threat: the risk of being suspected of a deviant sexuality. And as I have already shown, male quest romance frequently treats masculine anxieties; therefore, it is interesting to explore how this particular fear is treated in *The Sign* – and indeed the entire Holmes canon.

Two men living together as bachelors cannot have been unheard of during the British *fin de siècle*, although the ideal man was married, providing for his family and behaving himself honourably. “A real man was a man who was natural, and to be natural was to be married and chaste. An unmanly man did not recognize his obligation to marry” (Nissen, *Romantic Friendship Reader* 5). Nowhere does either Holmes or Watson make explicit reference to any sexual preference for men. But still modern adaptations of the Holmes stories – most notably in film and television – tend to play with the idea that the detective and his biographer were homosexual, or at least not entirely heterosexual. Two men who “know each other intimately” (*Memoirs* 302), as Watson himself describes them, who share rooms and show little or no inclination for courting ladies, are of

course strongly suggestive to a modern reader. Our suspicion, if one can use such a loaded word about sexuality, is helped along further by Holmes, who – in one of only two stories he narrates himself – petulantly blames Watson for his own loneliness: “The good Watson had at that time deserted me for a wife, the only selfish action which I can recall in our association. I was alone” (*Casebook* 30). He demonstrates this very pointedly also in the very last words of *The Sign of the Four*. Watson asks, “I get a wife out of it, Jones gets the credit; pray what remains for you?” And the reply, pointedly, is: “‘For me,’ said Sherlock Holmes, ‘there still remains the cocaine bottle.’ And he stretched his long, white hand up for it” (204). Upon his return from his Reichenbach demise, Holmes also likens himself to Cleopatra, indicating a certain femininity in his self-presentation: “I trust that age doth not wither nor custom stale my infinite variety” (*Return* 12). This is not the first time he has used feminized terms to describe himself; in *The Sign*, he mentions that Watson has never yet recognised Holmes' merits as a housekeeper (172). To an educated late-Victorian reader, it must have been odd to imagine the austere consulting detective being compared to the decadent Queen of the Nile, save that Holmes is somewhat decadent himself. He takes cocaine, he sits on the floor on heaps of pillows, he adores music with a passion, he is “moved to [his] depths by spontaneous wonder and praise from a friend” (*Return* 187). Watson calls him bohemian, and admits that the good doctor is himself rather of that turn.

It is interesting to note that Holmes' character corresponds on many points to Edward Carpenter's 1894 description of Urnings, or people attracted to those of their own sex: healthy and emotionally complex, possessing great intuition and strong artistic tendencies. Holmes is a man “of brooding reserved habits”, a “man of culture, courted in society, which nevertheless does not understand him” (Carpenter 306). Carpenter, of course, defended Urnings and described them in favourable terms, quite unlike other, contemporary descriptions of homosexuals as degenerates. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, for example, in 1886 used such words to describe them as “moral perversity”, “anatomical or functional abnormalities”, “repugnant” and “morbid” – and he concluded that chapter with a plea for society to pity, and the law to cease punishing, “these unfortunates” (302-03). This is not to suggest that the Holmes character was anachronistically modelled on Carpenter's definitions, but rather to point out that an argument could be made for Holmes being unconventional enough to have his sexuality debated. In fact, he has been considered unconventional enough to have his very biological sex debated⁹, but within the scope of this thesis, I shall let that argument be ended by Watson's clear statements that Sherlock Holmes is, biologically speaking, a man. There simply aren't enough pages.

To sum up: in the first Holmes novel, we enter an entirely homosocial milieu where men

9 See Bradley and Sarjeant, *Ms Holmes of Baker Street: the Truth About Sherlock*

admire and help other men, or hunt and take revenge upon other men. Women, though they may act as triggers to a crime, are entirely absent. Three years later, a new novel is published, and Watson waxes poetic every time Mary Morstan is present in the room or his thoughts, while Holmes has become a decided misogynist. That is to say, the sleuth does not seem to dislike Mary Morstan at all, but he does have some fairly scathing things to say about women in general, as I have pointed out in section 1.1. A marriage is arranged with impressive speed, and Holmes bemoans Watson's decision and tells him that there is now only the cocaine left for the great sleuth. However, in the following stories we see so little of Watson's wife after this that the doctor might as well not have married; he certainly does not change his habit of following Holmes around. Holmes remains as cold and bohemian as ever, although he declares that "I am lost without my Boswell" and that he wishes Watson to accompany him on cases (*Adventures* 7). Additionally, over the next nearly four decades of publishing, the stories detail the Holmes-Watson 'bromance,' the intense but not erotic relationship between the two men, in increasingly emotional terms. It moves from a persistent use of 'my friend Sherlock Holmes' and 'my dear Watson' in the first collections of stories (*Adventures* and *Memoirs*), via Watson describing Holmes as "the man whom above all others I revere" (*Casebook* 117), to the dramatic scene in "The Three Garridebs" (*Casebook*) where Watson gets shot and Holmes gets rather upset:

'You're not hurt, Watson? For God's sake, say that you are not hurt?'

It was worth a wound – it was worth many wounds – to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask. ... All my years of humble but single-minded service culminated in that moment of revelation.

... [Holmes] glared at our prisoner, who was sitting up with a dazed face. 'By the Lord, it is as well for you. If you had killed Watson, you would not have got out of this room alive' (*The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes* 114-115).

Perhaps one expects less emotional restraint in literature written in the 1920s than in the 1890s, so that the difference between the paragraph above, published in 1924, and Watson's reaction when Holmes is being strangled in 1894, quoted below, can be put down to literary periods:

The two Cunninghams were bending over the prostrate figure of Sherlock Holmes, the younger clutching his throat with both hands ... In an instant the three of us had torn them away from him, and Holmes staggered to his feet, very pale and evidently greatly exhausted.

'Arrest these men, inspector,' he gasped (*The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* 389).

But of course, the way Watson speaks about Mary is demonstrative enough, and *The Sign* was

published in the same period as the *Memoirs*. No further mention is made of the attack, save that Holmes asks for a little brandy as he has taken a knocking-about. As the bullet merely grazes Watson's leg, that injury can hardly be more serious and therefore call for a stronger reaction than Holmes' near strangling, and yet Holmes nearly cries with emotion over the former. The contrast is striking, and yet how significant can it be? Is it a natural character development based on the length of their acquaintance? Did Doyle feel freer to let them express such attachment in the twenties than he did in the nineties? Regardless of how we interpret the difference, those paragraphs of nearly purple prose where Watson is injured may strike the reader as belonging to a different genre than the male quest romance: romantic friendship fiction. The emotional attachment, the almost romantic appreciation of each others' fine qualities: they seem odd, perhaps, to a modern reader, but they belong to a lengthy tradition of works where young men form fierce bonds as part of a friendship cult¹⁰. This, as briefly discussed in the introduction, lends itself to the suggestion that romantic friendship fiction did not entirely die out, but, through male quest romance, changed into what is popularly known today as 'bromance': a celebration of close, non-homosexual relationships between men.

Returning, however, to Holmes and Watson's crisis of sexuality, I would argue that Mary seems to be a temporary aberration while Holmes and his Bohemian traits is a fixture. The question all this seems to beg is, was Watson married off to avoid accusations of sexual deviancy? Were the late-Victorian reading public suspicious of these two literary characters and their morality? These questions suggest a male reaction to a direct threat of the period; the aforementioned homophobic blackmail. In a male quest romance, the homosocial milieu is almost a genre requirement, but it would almost seem as if this homosociality, this androcentricity, is the very thing which destabilises the characters' identities.

David Stuart Davies, Sherlock Holmes aficionado, states in the introduction to *A Study in Scarlet & The Sign of the Four* that, "this time there are no women directly involved in the intrigue ... Therefore, Doyle cleverly weaves a romantic subplot into the tale" (xii). This, then, is a possible explanation for the suggestive points I have mentioned above: the criminals had no love interests, therefore Watson must have one. Now, on two counts I will venture to disagree with Davies' interpretation: one, that the lack of women in the first mystery compelled Doyle to do anything, and two, that what he did was done cleverly. The first point may have much to do with genre; as already discussed, women are not prominent figures in male quest romances. Also, many books have been written and will be written which contain no women of importance; an author does not have a woman quota to fill in each text. I think it is also critically sound to disagree as to the romance

10 For a detailed exposition and analysis of this genre, see N. A. Nissen's *Manly Love*.

being cleverly constructed. The client happens to be female and Watson falls in love with her as soon as he sees her; it is a very stereotypical 'damsel in distress' scenario – one may find it in many folk tales, even. There are woman clients in many of the other Holmes stories, including those where Watson still (or again) lives in Baker Street and so is a single man. They are usually clients and nothing more; so could Mary Morstan have been. There is probably a reason why Doyle lets her double as both client and love interest, but since he is quick to dismiss her from the rest of the Holmes series, that reason is unlikely to have anything to do with Mary herself. She was clearly written for Watson.

It would be foolish to rule out other purposes to which a wife could be put. Perhaps Doyle was appealing to an audience of young ladies as well as young men, hoping that a love interest would make his novel more palatable to romantics. Perhaps the author hopes to show development in Watson's character; as mentioned earlier, becoming a man included starting a family, and Watson is assuming his manly responsibility in quitting his bachelor existence and establishing a respectable home. Homosexuality was not the only sin Holmes and Watson could be accused of; it could be that the life of a bohemian bachelor was not thought to be a good literary influence on young readers. Very early in the twentieth century, writes Frank Mort, "[t]o remain unmarried was not only selfish from the racial point of view, it was also unmanly, because it broke the patriarchal chain" (153). Watson, if not Holmes, is doing his part to further the race and uphold the patriarchal chains. Then perhaps Mary serves to illustrate how regular people act as a contrast to the cold, unfeeling Holmes, who, despite his brilliance, is very eccentric. All of these are possible and plausible, and yet, is it not strange that Doyle should make no more use of this device when once it had appeared in one novel? In fact, the most suggestive argument against all of these explanations is that Mary dies while Holmes is considered dead, and only Holmes returns – and with him, Watson's bohemian lifestyle. She came, she married, she disappeared, and seems to have left no impression whatsoever – except that the romantic Watson seems to have been an aberration.

Naturally, we cannot know what the average reader thought of Holmes and Watson's sexualities at the time of publishing. But the sudden, almost panicky way the marriage is achieved suggests a hasty response to some perceived or imagined hostility. And if that is so, it is highly ironic that the extremely homosocial and somewhat misogynist space created by the male quest romance genre in order to escape feminine influences, is precisely what renders both authors and their characters vulnerable to homophobic blackmail. Regardless, anxiety about male sexuality and the social sanctioning of it is one explanation for Watson's romantic outburst; this would make *The Sign of the Four* a surprisingly literal illustration of the homosexual panic which affected men – both real and literary – at the *fin de siècle*.

1.3 “A high-functioning sociopath”¹¹

One could argue that it is pointless to try to diagnose a literary character; their symptoms are as made-up as the characters are, and really, both medicine and psychology have come too far to apply our modern ideas of illness to characters written well over a century ago. Still, it seems to be quite a hobby of Holmes fans to attempt a diagnosis of the great detective; a quick Google search will tell one as much. Did he have Asperger's? Was he manically depressive? A sociopath, perhaps, or simply a raving lunatic? Quite aside from the fact that most such mental illnesses or personality disorders do not automatically produce brilliant reasoners with a flair for showmanship, whether or not Sherlock Holmes was insane is not really important to this thesis. The interesting question is, how does mental illness feature in the Holmes canon, and why?

As discussed in the Introduction, men struggled with their gender identity during the *fin de siècle* in a way they had not previously struggled. The new classifications of sexuality and the rise of women's rights movements have been briefly discussed above. The former of these also to some degree falls under the new threat I discuss here: mental illness. As the new sciences of psychology, sexology and criminology emerged, new names were found for complaints both old and new. Sexual preferences were pathologised where before they had been only criminalised; “[the] sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species” (Foucault 43)¹², and a morbid one at that. A man dissolved in tears had been permissible among Georgian men of feeling, yet by the end of the nineteenth century the manliest virtue of the day was self-control (Oppenheim 146); therefore, a man laid low by nervous prostration was less of a man than his healthy neighbour. In fact, men were frequently wilfully diagnosed with neurasthenia rather than hysteria, because the latter was considered unmanly. Medical men, however, could not ignore the fact that though hysteria was considered a female disease, affected men displayed the same symptoms as hysterical women (Oppenheim chapter 5). Mental illness, therefore, rendered men unmanly because they were exhibiting feminine traits or symptoms. Of course, criminals were supposedly possible to spot at ten paces; atavism and evil blood was thought by many to manifest in unattractive physical features – a frequent topic in the Sherlock Holmes canon, as we shall see.

When Max Nordau wrote, in 1895, of degeneration, he argued that the degenerate is one of the prime dangers to civilisation. Of course, this theory is hardly scientifically sound; I feel George Bernard Shaw expresses it best: “This theory of [Nordau's] is, at bottom, nothing but the familiar

11 A quote from the 2011 BBC production *Sherlock*, where one of the police officials calls Holmes a psychopath, and the latter snaps, “I'm not a psychopath, Anderson, I'm a high-functioning sociopath. Do your research.”

12 Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* is not, in any way, a neutral historical work, nor does he cite his sources. We may consider his *History* a work of interpretation; the suggestion that sexuality was classified and pathologised in an entirely new way during the nineteenth century, is one which supports an understanding of this period being experienced as a crisis.

delusion of the used-up man that the world is going to the dogs” (Shaw 20). However, the theories of degeneration “wielded considerable cultural influence” (Ledger and Luckhurst 2), and therefore I have found it interesting to apply Nordau's description of a degenerate to characters from *The Sign of the Four*. The degenerate is a person who is over-emotional, morally insane, and mentally despondent or melancholy (Nordau 13-17). According to Watson's repeated use of adjectives such as “cold,” “distant” and “ascetic”, we can deduce that Holmes is by no means over-emotional, but he is arguably very melancholy – when he is not active to the point of mania. “He was bright, eager, and in excellent spirits, a mood which in his case alternated with fits of the blackest depression” (*The Sign* 121). The second Holmes novel opens on Holmes in one of these black moods: he is self-medicating with a seven per cent solution of cocaine, which he finds “so transcendently stimulating and clarifying to the mind” (109) that he refuses to give it up, despite Watson's insistence as a medical man. When he does not have a case, Holmes is clearly depressed, holding indoor shooting practice and abusing various substances to distract himself from “such a dreary, dismal, unprofitable world” (115). When he does have a case, he rarely sleeps, eats or rests until he has solved it, so that for days on end he wears himself out with work – to Watson's consternation. Holmes “loathed every form of society with his whole Bohemian soul” (*Adventures* 3), so we may assume he has few friends save Watson and his brother Mycroft – he is isolated, on the fringes of society. Finally, he tells us himself that his view of the law is not as stringent as one would expect from a detective: “I had rather play tricks with the law of England than with my own conscience” (*Return* 271-272). He is hardly morally insane, but his conscience does lead him to burgle houses (“Charles Augustus Milverton”) and aid the occasional murderer in escaping (“The Abbey Grange”). One does not dare diagnose Holmes, but he is clearly not entirely untroubled – at the very least, Watson tells us he struggles with depression, lethargy and a tendency to mania.

Now, it is no secret that most people in the texts admire Holmes, despite his sometimes inhuman qualities. In fact, there is a marked tendency of other men to shout praise at short intervals every time Holmes makes an explanation, which invariably happens at least once in each story.

“‘Wonderful!’ I ejaculated.” (*Study* 18)

“‘Excellent!’ cried Mr Acton. ... ‘Excellent!’ cried Mr Acton again.” (*Memoirs* 392)

“‘It is wonderful!’ I exclaimed.” (*Adventures* 85)

“‘Ay, that's remarkable,’ said the inspector thoughtfully. ‘Talk away, Mr Holmes. I'm just loving it. It's fine!’” (*Valley* 183)

“‘Wonderful! Wonderful!’” (Officer Mason, *Valley* 198)

“‘Excellent!’ said Hopkins.” (*Return* 264)

The point is, his companions seem – although they do not entirely understand Holmes – to admire

him, despite his oddity. Any charges of personality disorders or madness one attempts to lay at his door cannot change the fact that Holmes is greatly appreciated by those around him. In fact, he receives invitations to social arrangements he does not want: “This looks like one of those unwelcome social summonses which call upon a man either to be bored or to lie” (*Adventures* 201). Therefore it is not unreasonable to read Sherlock Holmes and his moods as a mild suggestion that mental otherness, as long as it does not take evil forms, is not necessarily equal to unmanliness, or indignity. A brilliant reasoner at the height of his profession, a man admired by all who meet him and applauded by his audience, can also struggle with depression, drug abuse and perhaps even loneliness. If this is Doyle's manner of dealing with mental illness, the tone is a very hopeful one.

On the other hand, villains in the Holmes canon seem almost uniformly to be evil by birth, and unattractive, too. It is clear that ideas of atavism, of the visible vice with which there was a general obsession during the late nineteenth century (Showalter 177), are prevalent in Doyle's writings. Take our first murder victim from *Study*, for example: his evil life is reflected in his features, “the low forehead, blunt nose and prognathous jaw” give him an “apelike appearance” which gives Watson trouble sleeping just thinking about it (22). Watson is not entirely certain that the murderer has not done the world a favour, for if “ever human features bespoke vice of the most malignant type they were certainly those” of the dead man (33). In fact, monkeys, rats and other animals are frequently alluded to by Watson in his descriptions of criminals, from murderers like Jonathan Small and his “heavy brows and aggressive chin” (*The Sign* 180), to forgers like Jonas Oldacre who darts out of his hiding place “like a rabbit out of its burrow” (*Return* 44). Of the escaped convict in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Watson sees “an evil yellow face, a terrible animal face, all seamed and scored with vile passions” (*Hound* 97-98). The villain of that same novel is described as “that lean-jawed pike” (142). One needs only rifle through a Holmes collection and the criminals are, more often than not, either sharp, small and shifty or low-browed, uncouth and with protruding jaws. It is a little strange, perhaps, that Doyle – himself a medical man – should so far believe in atavism as to make it a pattern in his writing; however, hindsight is not a trustworthy lens through which to evaluate the past.

Then there are the clients. Woman clients, of course, may be as hysterical or as collected as they wish; they are, after all, women. Holmes does not trust them, and though Watson has the utmost appreciation for their ladylike qualities, he does not expect them to be rational or calm. But the men who come to Holmes for help are usually as clearly physically marked as the crooks – the difference lies in the victimisation. There were a few things which quite excused a man from blame when he suffered a nervous breakdown, such as shock, bereavement or intense disappointment (Oppenheim 155), and it is clear that Doyle also subscribed to this belief. In “The Naval Treaty” the

client has an attack of brain fever lasting nine weeks when a document is stolen, and the detective agrees that the client's employer is both understanding and reasonable when he postpones any repercussions until the client is well enough to handle them. The father of the main suspect in "The Beryl Coronet" has seen his son arrested and his career threatened in the same day, and nobody asks him to pull himself together despite the fact that he can hardly state his case for excitement. In "The Missing Three-Quarter" the young man being missed is discovered crying uncontrollably by the side of his dead wife; his tears are not in any way described as unnatural or unmanly. Thaddeus Sholto, though an obviously decadent weakling, is not put in a worse light than he manages to do himself by his words; Watson does him no injustice nor compares him to any animal. All in all, weakness, fainting, crying and other behaviour which does not fit with the late-Victorian ideal of manly self-control is only natural and perfectly permissible when it comes in response to shocks such as ordinary men ought not to be forced to bear. Even Watson is permitted a little outburst; when Holmes suddenly reappears after Reichenbach Falls, Watson promptly faints and Holmes must pour brandy down his throat to revive him. Mrs Hudson, of course, is thrown into "violent hysterics" (*Return* 9) at the same reappearance.

To summarise, the treatment of mental illness and related topics seems almost progressive; at the very least, we may say that Doyle allows a play of various mental states to become prominent in his texts. Holmes himself brings to mind what we today would call bipolar or manic-depressive, and yet is none the worse as a hero. Watson is a damaged war veteran, and all the more manly for it. Clients may faint and take to their beds for weeks without losing our, Holmes' or Watson's sympathies, because it is unreasonable that people should be tried so and not suffer reactions. The only aspect of the Holmes stories in this area that can really be called reactionary, is the treatment of criminals: the criminally or morally insane look the part and rarely have any good qualities at all; they are purely villainous.

Read as a male quest romance, we can see that *The Sign of the Four* explores the destabilising effects on male identity of femininity, mental illness and male sexuality. But it does so not, perhaps, in the way one expects if one does the reading with Haggard or R. L. Stevenson in mind. Women are not at all represented by seductive vampires or vicious goddesses; in fact, if Mary Morstan is any indication, Watson seems determined to convince the reader that girls are, indeed, made from sugar and spice and everything nice. This text does not explore female interference in male spheres directly, but rather by excluding all possibly interfering women from the narrative. Instead of men defeating horrible mutations of femininity, *The Sign* shows us men who, though they may be attacked by anything else, will never have to worry about women becoming dangerous. Despite this

discrepancy, Doyle's novel resembles Haggard's in that it is highly androcentric, a qualifying characteristic of these male bonding narratives. Thus it is only men who encounter criminals whose very faces testify to what will happen to the race when men give in to their baser instincts. It is men who struggle with substance abuse as a result of mental instability, and only men must defend their professional pride, like the police inspector and the Jewish boat owner. It is men whose sexuality is questioned, and their identities who, in turn, are challenged. Mary's marriage to Watson is rarely questioned with regards to her motivation; certainly, I have been unable to find any academic material discussing her sexuality. Her marriage is taken as a given, while not even that marriage will stop the writers of BBC's *Sherlock* from playing with the male protagonists' sexual orientation.

Men struggle in the text, but on a hopeful note, good men seem to overcome difficulties in a way which suggests less despair and more room for a multiplicity of masculine ideals. *The Sign* gently examines mental illness, and seems to hint that a man's masculinity and hence his identity are not irrevocably ruined by a little depression. Sherlock Holmes is certainly unconventional, especially when contrasted with his friend Watson: he struggles with both depression and a drug habit; compares himself to Cleopatra and is bested by a woman; prefers to live in solitude yet displays bitterness at the fact that Watson leaves him to get married. He is a far cry from the respectable, middle-class, white English man, and yet he is admired as an exceptional man and unquestionably a fine detective. Holmes the sleuth is a man who, despite his otherness, in many ways creates a new masculine ideal, rather than vigorously fights to retain the 'old' ones. Between Holmes and Watson, we see at least two interpretations of masculinity, both of which are entirely valid. The dreaded multiplicity of masculinities, then, is not at all dreadful in the Holmes stories.

Mental illness and women voters do not frighten the men of the Holmes stories, for women always meekly leave the stage to men, and if a bipolar drug addict can be a hero, surely neurasthenic men have nothing to fear. But the one anxiety which neither this novel nor the entire Holmes canon seems able to resolve, is that of sexuality. Very simply put, Mary Morstan can be read as an alibi for Holmes and Watson's not entirely heterosexual dispositions. She seems too incongruous with the rest of the Holmes canon not to question her, and over a hundred years later, readers are still eagerly debating Holmes' sexual preferences. Homophobic blackmail aside, the fact that Watson seems required, for the length of one novel and no more, to possess a sexuality at all, is suggestive. What need is there of sexuality in a male quest romance, where the purpose is a quest and not a marriage? The first Holmes novel resolved the conflict without either Holmes or Watson so much as hinting at a love interest; all the following stories do the same. *The Sign of the Four* remains in the reader's mind as the one exception suggestive of some anxiety which the text cannot entirely dispel.

2. *Dracula*: Reinforcing Manly Superiority

While there is a curious dearth of serious critical work done on the Sherlock Holmes canon, Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) appears as a text nearly done to death with readings and analyses, providing manifold starting points for any fresh reading. Psychoanalytical readings are numerous, because the text lends itself so easily to questions of sexuality and fears both suppressed and expressed. Indeed, Nina Auerbach suggests in the introduction to *Our Vampires, Ourselves* that vampires are so popular because they reveal something of the state of our society over time – the vampire develops alongside our culture (1-9). In 1888 the feminist Mona Caird wrote, while treating the subject of marriage, of “that vampire ‘Respectability’ which thenceforth was to fasten upon, and suck the life-blood of all womanhood” (78) – a far more literal application of the term than for example a Freudian interpretation of the phallic significance of vampire teeth. Vampires have been discussed as critiques of consumerism in a capitalist tradition (Tanya Pikula, 2012), and as expressions of deviant sexualities, as becomes clear in this chapter. Post-colonial theory also finds a rich mine of material in Stoker's narrative. This famous vampire novel therefore seems to differ from *The Sign* in its critical treatment; however, in one respect *Dracula* and Sherlock Holmes are quite similar – they have both spawned a mass of adaptations and fan works. As mentioned in the Introduction, the Count and the sleuth are undoubtedly two of the most famous remnants of *fin de siècle* literature, and share a place in the reading public's imagination which they are unlikely to lose in the near future. However, for the purposes of this thesis, a chapter on *Dracula* will necessarily both benefit from and have to navigate an immense critical tradition, where Sherlock Holmes seems sadly neglected in comparison. Therefore, my discussion of the two texts will differ somewhat, both as a result of their content and their already established critical traditions. The main focus of my discussion on *Dracula* is also on challenges to men's identities and how they appear in the male quest romance genre. However, the two texts treat this topic in rewardingly different ways; not only in the type of masculinity which is upheld as ideal by example of the protagonists, but also – and most strikingly – in how mental illness is portrayed.

Although arguably the world's most famous vampire story, *Dracula* is also much more than a horror tale. It has been called “a veritable sexual lexicon of Victorian taboos” (Pikula 283), indicating that sexuality and psychology are important aspects, perhaps just as important as the monster at the heart of the narrative. There are many prominent features of the Gothic present in the novel, as I discuss further in section 2.2. Eve Sedgwick has discussed the Gothic literary tradition as greatly concerned with paranoia; tales of relentless and often uncanny persecution are common (97-117). Finally, more than any text in the Sherlock Holmes canon with which I compare it, this

vampire story is explicit in uttering that men are fighting a constant battle. Van Helsing appears as one of the novel's strongest voices, not only on grounds of his authority and knowledge of vampires, but also because his speech is far more distinct than any of the others due to his odd, foreign English – we must read his utterances more carefully to grasp the nuances of them, and so we automatically engage more closely with him on a textual level. Therefore we note it well when Van Helsing wails, “Oh, how we are beset! How are all the powers of the devils against us!” (*Dracula* 126). And indeed, the male protagonists face several challenges. Unrequited love, mental illness and physical ailments are only the secondary sufferings of the group battling an ancient vampire, struggling for their own and others' lives. In addition to the challenges posed by the plot – by having to battle evil – these protagonists face difficulties of a different kind. These difficulties, as I demonstrate in the following chapter, explore the aforementioned crisis in masculinity in a literary space with strong supernatural elements – an important difference from the Holmes stories.

Regarding its genre, *Dracula* is a arguably Gothic novel in many respects. Sedgwick lists several defining characteristics of that genre in her discussion of James Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). She states:

Reasons for considering it Gothic are that it is ambiguously supernatural, that it is lurid, that it is “psychological” (i.e., literalizes and externalizes, for instance as murder or demonic temptation, conflicts that are usually seen as internal), that its action seems to be motivated by religious absolutes, and, most importantly, that it richly thematizes male paranoia. (97)

One can certainly read the Count himself as an externalisation of human needs or lusts, and the hunt for him as our better selves' attempt to eradicate the evil within. However, it is also possible to follow Showalter in treating it as a male quest romance; she likens *Dracula* to *Her and Heart of Darkness* (179), both of which she has discussed as specific examples of that genre, and *Dracula* shares many distinct traits with these other male quest romances. The focus is mainly on plot and adventure rather than character development, for the central point of interest is the vampire and how he is to be defeated. Then the novel opens in an exotic location; Transylvania is a strange place where East and West intersect, “one of the wildest and least known portions of Europe” (*Dracula* 5). When the narrative shifts to London, we see that the great metropolis becomes uncanny and strange with the presence of Dracula. This is similar to *The Sign*, of course, where the presence of the Agra treasure and Holmes' quest transforms the city. In *Dracula* there are giant bats and wolves on the loose, and the vampires hunt their unwitting prey among the “teeming millions” (51) – the Count his women, and Lucy her children. Near the end of the novel, the setting even moves back to the strangeness of Transylvania. The heroes resort to mystical items and rituals; they rely on Holy

Water, the Host, crosses and prayer books. Furthermore, there is a group of men working together towards a common goal, in a group from which they try to exclude women – this is discussed in greater detail in both 2.1 and 2.3. This intensely homosocial milieu is central to the male quest romance genre as defined by Showalter, and it has been noted that the band of men lead by Van Helsing are remarkably concerned with praising each others' "stalwart manhood" and fawning over each other as shining examples of masculinity (Auerbach 81). This, as discussed in the Introduction, is the most important function of the male quest romance: it is a space where men may exist independently of women, and also create strong, homosocial bonds to other men. It is a space where men may explore their masculinity, and treat their concerns in an all-male setting. These concerns saturate *Dracula*, which is why I will accept Showalter's definition of the novel as belonging to the male quest romance genre and discuss it accordingly.

2.1 Voluptuous Vampire Women

The woman characters of *Dracula* challenge and bring new light to a reading of this novel as pure male quest romance, and therefore constitute one of the most interesting themes for analysis. There is Lucy, around whom the first battle with the Count is centred; four men give their blood for her, and when she dies, Van Helsing ensures the group continues to work for her salvation: "I have come here ... to help a sweet young lady ... I came to love" (*Dracula* 193). There is Mina, of course, whose "man's brain ... and woman's heart" (218) makes her indispensable to the men and instrumental in the hunt for Dracula. She acts as a sort of information hub, ensuring the men have all the available information about the Count and his victims, and in her role of narrator of large parts of the manuscript she acts as the lens through which we perceive the other characters. Then there are the three vampire women living in Castle Dracula, whose playful wickedness is sharply contrasted with Mina's demure respectability and Lucy's sweet purity, and whose openly sexual advances towards Jonathan provide material for volumes of discussion. In addition we find the innkeeper's wife in Transylvania, sister Agatha who cares for Jonathan during his brain-fever, the woman whose child is stolen by Dracula, and the young lady in the carriage outside a jewellery shop – Dracula follows her, and whether he bites her or not is left entirely to the reader's imagination. These minor characters, however, act much like Mrs Hudson and the Sholtos' housekeeper from *The Sign* in that they have very little bearing on the narrative; compared to Mina and Lucy, they are far less important. Therefore I focus solely on Lucy, Mina and the three vampire women, who challenge the genre traits of the male quest romance. Precisely because of this challenge, it is interesting and fruitful to explore in greater detail the roles of women in *Dracula*.

If a male quest romance is mainly concerned with providing men with a woman-free or nearly woman-free space, Mina alone could arguably invalidate placing *Dracula* within this genre. Indeed, it is possible to see her as a New Woman type: “Mina represents the New Woman's intellectual ambitions; she is a schoolmistress with strong organizational skills and an astonishing memory, who knows shorthand and all the train schedules” (Showalter 180-81). New Women are undeniably connected with feminism; Sarah Grand, when she coined the term in 1894, wrote that the woman of the future “will be stronger and better ... and now woman holds out a strong hand to the child-man, and insists, but with infinite tenderness and pity, upon helping him up” (89-90). It is not unreasonable, therefore, to suggest that the characterisation of a New Woman type in a *fin de siècle* novel suggests the attitude of the text on the topic of feminism. As Mina is uniformly praised by the men in the novel, one could argue that said novel is somewhat protofeminist – that Mina as New Woman is held up as a shining example to all womanhood. The chivalric attitudes of the men, though a natural element of the romance genre, seem to echo Watson in his assessment of women as treasures, angels and perfect companions all at once. Van Helsing in particular praises Mina for paragraphs on end: “Oh, you so clever woman!”, he calls her, and adds, “if ever Abraham Van Helsing can do anything for you or yours, I trust you will let me know. It will be pleasure and delight if I may serve you as a friend” (171). Even when deciding that this “pearl among women” (203) must not be included in their schemes to hunt the Count, Van Helsing continues to extol her virtues; to “that wonderful Madam Mina” (218) he says, “You are too precious to us to have such risk” (225). Arthur and Quincey both cry on Mina's shoulder, and Quincey declares, “No one but a woman can help a man when he is in trouble of the heart” (215). Mina's mere presence makes Dr Seward feel comfortable in his own lunatic asylum: “for the first time since I have lived in it, this old house seemed like *home*” (216).

Even after she has been attacked by Dracula, Mina is an ideal woman to the men surrounding her: “She was so good and brave that we all felt that our hearts were strengthened to work and endure for her” (270). She has now become the rallying point around which the brotherhood gathers to fight evil, assuming Lucy's former function. Jonathan recalls, “We men pledged ourselves to raise the veil of sorrow from the head of her whom, each in his own way, we loved” (276). There is something undeniably Sedgwickian about Mina's role here; she is the woman who mediates male bonds. She introduces her husband to the other men through Van Helsing, and through their interest in Mina – in protecting her, in avenging her, and in loving her – the men form a strong group which is eventually able to overcome their enemy. Men are ready to bleed, kill and die to protect women, because women are the angels of the world who make life worth living. Read in this light, *Dracula* seems more like a love story – one of men and women overcoming all through

mutual adoration – than a male quest romance.

Then how can one argue that Stoker wrote a “repeated polemic against ... the suffragette and the New Woman” (Glover 45)? That in his novels, the author is trying to “conjecture new ideals of masculinity and femininity in the face of political movements he distrusted”, those movements including the women's rights movement (18)? David Glover, in *Vampires, Mummies and Liberals*, discusses evidence which suggests Bram Stoker was something of a misogynist (chapter 3). Therefore, it is worthwhile to read the women characters of *Dracula* with a more nuanced view; they are not necessarily an expression of feminist strains in the text merely because they are characterised as clever and beautiful. In fact, I am inclined to agree with Tanya Pikula when she states that Mina “is often a mouthpiece for the Victorian ideology of “stalwart manhood” and nurturing, admiring femininity” (289). Just as Conan Doyle's women portray a certain form of femininity and are praised by the men for it, so the women of Stoker's novel are defined as good women by men's responses, rendering the novel less feminist and more reactionary. To further explore the place of women in *Dracula*, I first discuss how women are characterised; how we as readers understand their personalities and traits. Secondly, I analyse the narrative functions of the woman characters; what they actually do and how important they are to the plot.

As mentioned, the male protagonists are generous with their praise of the admirable qualities in their female counterparts, and none are praised more highly than Mina. Van Helsing rarely mentions Mina without heaping compliments on her, and he has an attentive audience in her husband and three other men who befriend her. Of course, Jonathan is pleased to hear his wife talked of; “I would listen to him go on praising Mina for a day” (176). Seward has heard his mentor talk of “that wonderful Madam Mina ... pearl among women” (203) before he ever sets eyes on her, and within hours of meeting her, both Arthur and Quincey can attest to her kindness and worth. When a careless comment of his upsets her, Van Helsing apologises heartily: “alas! that I, of all who so reverence you, should have said anything so forgetful” (275). Reverence is truly the right word for what the men express throughout the novel; they revere Mina as an idol. She represents purity, kindness and light; she is useful to her husband and his mission, generous and comforting to “all who suffer from the heart” (215), and she is acutely aware of impropriety so as to remain respectable at all times. There can be no doubt that Mina is seen by the other characters, and presented to the reader, as the absolute epitome of womanliness. She is caring and kind, clever but only interested in being helpful to her husband, obedient to men, and somewhat self-deprecating over her womanhood, ensuring that any censure to women is uttered in a woman's voice. “Men are more tolerant, bless them!” she says when she and Lucy eat more than could be considered proper (85), suggesting that any censure would come from other women, not men. Mina's greatest fear as

she brings Lucy back home from the graveyard at Whitby is that anyone should see them and so start rumours about her friend; women must not be seen about at night without proper dress – even though the circumstances are entirely innocent. Playing a small trick on Van Helsing when she first meets him, Mina is “almost ashamed” (171) of her mischievousness and blames it on the morally unsound nature of women: “I suppose it is some of the taste of the original apple that remains still in our mouths” (170-171).

Although she is both clever and beautiful, both kind and brave, it is hard to see on what grounds Showalter classifies Mina as a New Woman, despite her technologically advanced skill set. One needs only consider Mina's own words about womanly obedience and manly superiority: “Last night I went to bed when the men had gone, simply because they told me to” (239). She allows that “[i]t is strange to me to be kept in the dark ... after Jonathan's full confidence for so many years” (238), so we can guess that Mina is not used to being kept out of her husband's affairs. Jonathan indicates the same; when the men have decided to keep Mina in the dark, he is “truly thankful” for her exclusion; “I did not think so at first, but I know better now” (236). Almost overnight, Jonathan and Mina's spheres have become separate – I return to the importance of the male group in this particular separation in section 2.3. But however much Mina may want to be included, or feel able to help the men, she does not insist or take the matter into her own hands; she defers completely to her husband and the “good, good wishes of those other strong men” (239). She does not, as Sarah Grand's New Woman, insist on anything – not even on helping the men.

In short, Mina is remarkably like Mary Morstan in that they both seem to epitomise conventional Victorian ideals of the feminine; they are beautiful, helpful and clever, but utterly unassertive. They give comfort and courage to men who have a difficult task at hand; Mary to Watson, Mina to the entire brotherhood. Mary is a model client with strains of a detective's intuition and Mina is clearly an able administrator, yet neither participates in the narrative beyond what men wish them to do – bring the letters, remember the train schedules. They are both described as a human incarnation of all good things; beauty, intelligence, kindness and selflessness. I would argue that when a woman character is portrayed as the best among women in this way, she represents the text's ideal. In *Dracula*, that ideal is the typical Victorian angel of the house, with the added attraction of a man's brain – not a clever woman's brain, of course – and self-sacrificing bravery. The ideal does not include, however, a woman who asserts a will of her own.

Then there is Lucy and the vampire women. The main reason why I discuss these women together rather than separately is not only the fact that they are all (eventually) vampires, but also the way in which they are described. Where Mina is concerned, we only know that she is attractive because of a few, short sentences: Seward meets “a sweet-faced, dainty-looking girl” at the train

station, and Jonathan notes her “beautiful hair” (275) even as her forehead is burned by the holy remedies of Van Helsing. The praise in her honour is concerned with her personality; she is entirely dissociated from sexuality or sensuality until she becomes vampirised. This is a marked contrast to the vampire women, who are mainly described through their physical attributes and their atavistic traits. The word “voluptuous” is used repeatedly to describe them, their lips are “ruby” or “scarlet” and their teeth are “like pearls”, and they are compared to animals – licking their lips and bending over Jonathan like prey. Dracula indicates that he has had sexual relations with them: “Yes, I too can love; you yourselves can tell it from the past” (40). The way they advance on Jonathan is distinctly sexual, and even in Van Helsing they awaken manly urges, defending themselves against his attack by appealing to his baser instincts: “She lay in her Vampire sleep, so full of life and voluptuous beauty that I shudder as though I have come to do murder”, the Professor notes as he stands ready to kill the first of the sister brides. “Yes, I was moved – I, Van Helsing, with all my purpose and with my motive for hate – I was moved to a yearning for delay which seemed to paralyse my faculties and to clog my very soul” (343). We know nothing of these vampire women save that they act sometimes like animals, that they eat babies, and that they are sexually attractive.

The interesting thing is that Lucy is also frequently described in physical terms, likening her more to the vampire women than to Mina. Ledger and Luckhurst call Lucy an “oversexed vamp” (75), and of course she clearly is after her transformation; as we have seen, vampires are notoriously sexy. But even Mina describe Lucy by appearance at first: “Lucy met me at the station, looking sweeter and lovelier than ever” (*Dracula* 61), and later, she “was looking sweetly pretty in her white lawn frock” (63). When she starts losing blood, and the doctors attend to her, Lucy is again described mainly by looks; she is bloodless, pale, sickly. After her death, we learn that Lucy was sweet, pure and innocent, but these words are used in contrast to emphasise her vampiric monstrosity. “The whole carnal and unspiritual appearance, seeming like a devilish mockery of Lucy's sweet purity” (199) deeply disturbs the men who loved her, and the changes in her appearance are enough to convince even Arthur that she must be destroyed. “The sweetness was turned to adamant, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness” (196). By the use of the word “voluptuous” alone, Lucy has been linked to the vampire women of Castle Dracula; in addition, she has begun attacking children like them, and she makes sexual advances towards men. As mentioned above, all vampires are monstrous, but what do we know of Lucy's character before she was bitten?

Lucy Westenra performs an important role in the narrative; she is the first field of battle where the men encounter Count Dracula, and it is around her that they first rally. She is most frequently focalised through others; not only Mina, but her three suitors often describe Lucy in

terms of sweetness, purity, and how much they love her. This likens her to Mina; by the men's praise and adoration, we are shown the wonderful character of the women – or rather, the traditionally feminine, respectable character of the women. When Lucy becomes a vampire, when she turns from a Mina-like, angelic woman to a blood-sucking sex fiend, even the gentle Dr Seward is ready to stake her: “At that moment the remnant of my love passed into hate and loathing; had she then to be killed, I could have done it with savage delight” (197). They destroy her, and for Van Helsing and his band “there was gladness and mirth and peace everywhere” (201-202) – not only because they have killed “the foul Thing which had taken Lucy's shape” (199), but also because their Lucy is now pure again; they have restored her to her former virtuous state. Lucy is, we are told, sweet and gentle like Mina, although she does not have that man's brain Van Helsing is so fond of. Thus, while she lives, Lucy is clearly a woman worth fighting for, and even after her death she unites the men and strengthens their bond. Lucy, by being both, reinforces the characterisation of women as pure and vampires as sexually deviant – or rather, of feminine sexuality as something monstrous. The text is clearly commenting on the destabilising effect of unfettered female sexuality.

Secondly, as stated, it is interesting to note what the women actually *do* in this novel. This is so interesting because, despite being described as typical angels of the house, the female characters of *Dracula* are not at all like Mary Morstan with regards to level of participation. Mina, as I have already mentioned, is essential to the narrative structure: she is responsible for collecting and organising all their loose ends, we might say. “In this matter dates are everything,” she says, “and I think if we get all our material ready, and have every item put in chronological order, we shall have done much” (208). She proceeds to type up everything that has happened, and with this information the group of men led by Van Helsing are eventually able to find the vampire and hunt him down. When, through her growing vampirism, Mina is able to enter Dracula's mind, she once more becomes vital to the band of brothers through hypnotism. “God be thanked that we have once again a clue” (291), Van Helsing says when Mina has shown them that Dracula is aboard a ship. When that no longer helps, Mina looks at the available data and sees something the men have missed: “They were so tired and worn-out and dispirited that there was nothing to be done till they had some rest ... I do believe that under God's Providence I have made a discovery” (325). She tells the men her discovery, leading them again in the right direction. “When I had done reading, Jonathan took me in his arms and kissed me. The others kept shaking me by both hands, and Dr Van Helsing said: – ‘Our dear Madam Mina is once more our teacher. Her eyes have seen where we were blinded’” (328). Mina is undeniably the administrator who brings all the men's efforts together in a joint venture, and though her efforts are intellectual rather than physical, it is clear that the vampire could not be defeated without her.

In comparison, Lucy is more passive in that she does not directly aid in the quest to defeat the vampire. She follows the instructions from Seward and Van Helsing, when she is ill, but through carelessness in others – her mother removing the garlic flowers, the men leaving her alone for a night – she still succumbs and dies a vampire. As mentioned above, her role is more abstract: it is not her actions, but her significance as a symbol which makes her an important character in the novel. We can easily read Lucy as the feminine ideal; sweet, beautiful, devoted and kind – and she apparently comes from a good family. When Seward, Van Helsing, Quincey and Arthur all gather to protect her, this is Arthurian romance revived. The brave knights – one of them actually named Arthur – lead by the wise doctor, sorcerer or something similar, combine their forces to defend not only a maiden in distress, but what she represents: purity, innocence, beauty, kindness and so on. This is one of the aspects of *Dracula* which links it most strongly with the male quest romance, which was considered as a revival of the traditional romance “descended from Arthurian epic” (Showalter 79). The traditionally feminine role of waiting passively to be rescued is familiar to us from fairy tales, legends and Gothic novels, and this role of plot muse is passed to Mina when Lucy is finally dead. What Lucy does, as compared to what she means, is rather insignificant: she sleepwalks and is bitten.

But then again, it has been argued that Lucy is in part to blame for her own vampiric infection. Richard Kaye calls her “flirtatious” and says that this aspect of her character “suggests an uncontainable eroticism, so she becomes vulnerable to vampiric assault”. This, he argues, makes her the opposite pole to Mina, “who has the virginal strength to ward off Dracula's advances” (Kaye 59). On vampire narratives in general, Alexandra Warwick states, “The effect of [the victim's inability to resist] is to transfer responsibility to the victim; the suggestion that they are ‘asking for it’ is central to the vampire myth” (Warwick 207). On *Dracula* in particular, she writes, “it is the greater strength of character that differentiates Mina's fate from Lucy's” (211). In other words, Lucy does do something: she sleepwalks and gets bitten, thereby allowing Dracula to slowly drain her and the men who love her (the blood transfusion is discussed in detail in section 2.3). This, of course, is why she must be contained and controlled: her sexuality, wanting to “marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble” (*Dracula* 58), and walking around Whitby “unclad as she was” (87), is a direct threat to men's lives. In this context, the staking (also dealt with in further detail below) of Lucy can be read as a corrective gang rape; a punishment for her behaviour and a way to ensure it does not happen again.

However, at this point I must take a decided issue with both Kaye and Warwick. First, on the grounds that Lucy is flirtatious; she is not described as such by anyone, but more importantly, although she is happy about receiving three proposals, she is sad on behalf of the men whom she

must turn down. She writes to Mina, “Being proposed to is all very nice and all that sort of thing, but it isn't at all a happy thing when you have to see a poor fellow, whom you know loves you honestly, going away and looking all broken-hearted ... I feel so miserable, though I am so happy” (*Dracula* 56). And she does turn down two proposals because she is waiting for Arthur; she does not toy with anyone's feelings. Second, Mina does not ward off Dracula at all; he bites her, and forces her to drink from him, putting her in Lucy's very place. In fact, Dracula tells her, “You may as well be quiet; it is not the first time, or the second, that your veins have appeased my thirst”. As the reader will note, this scene is disturbingly similar to a rape, but Mina is hardly asking for it: “I would have screamed out, only that I was paralysed” (267). It seems Kaye and Warwick are arguing that because Lucy flirts, she must be punished, while Mina alone is pure enough to escape that horrible fate. This reading suggests that the text has a purist agenda aimed at women, and the novel seems incredibly misogynist with this in mind. Finally, I propose that these critics are confusing “virginal strength” with five armed men, a detailed knowledge of the enemy they are dealing with, and a practice staking. While it is true that Mina is described as the best among women, it seems prejudiced to ignore the actual plot in order to read the text as more conservative about women than it might otherwise seem. This is not to deny that virginity and purity are held out as ideals in this novel; simply to point out that Lucy can equally well be seen as the first to die in a battle against evil, and the fact that Mina survives can be ascribed to more than her moral superiority – for example to a minimum of intelligence among her and her compatriots.

We see, then, that although they do spend some time sitting and waiting like Mary Morstan – Lucy waits for Arthur to propose, Mina waits for the men to hunt the Count, the sister brides even wait for Dracula to bring them food – the female characters of *Dracula* are actually vital to the narrative structure. Dracula drinks from women, and women become victims; the women then provide incentive to the protagonists to engage in conflict with the vampire, and Mina actively aids in resolving the conflict. The sister brides even approach Jonathan despite having been warned off him by Dracula; they are also vital in describing the nature of vampires, letting the reader know what horrible fate awaits Mina if the brotherhood cannot save her. Structurally, women are absolutely necessary to this narrative; and in this narrative, anxieties of femininity as a challenge to masculinity is explicitly played out. Women pose direct threats to men, but the challenge is met and male hegemony reasserted. Lucy as a vampire threatens Arthur when she tries to lure him away from the others, but she is neutralised and her power over men curbed by decisive masculine action. The sister brides at first threaten Jonathan's life as well as his sanity, but both are restored to him as the men band together and kill both these three vampire women and Dracula himself. If women challenge male hegemony in *Dracula*, their challenge is certainly met and put down before the end

of the novel. And then there is Mina, of course, who so strongly resembles Mary Morstan. Mina does not challenge the men's heroic status, because even though she can be considered the true heroine of the novel (her life is at stake, and it's for her sake that the other protagonists engage in the conflict), her participation only supports the men's actions, and she agrees to be completely dominated by them. Female sexuality and female power appear in the form of vampires as lethal threats to men's lives and identities, and are duly controlled. Simultaneously, a woman embodying the most traditional of Victorian values is presented as the absolute ideal.

So, does this novel function as a woman-free space, that being a prominent feature of the male quest romance? Clearly not; women are central to the plot, both as a driving force behind the men's actions like Lucy, and as agents – Mina is instrumental, after all, both in telling the story and in providing the power of a detailed knowledge of the vampire. However, *Dracula* does create a space where men are the decision makers, the heroes, and ultimately in control of femininity. Lucy and the women vampires are destroyed; whether we consider them as embodiments of female sexuality or as Suffragettes, women with penetrative powers are assuredly contained by masculine action – in fact, by driving large wooden phalluses through their bodies, we might say. Mina's involvement in adventures comes to an end with the birth of her son; although motherhood was considered a sacred duty by some feminists of the *fin de siècle*, this role makes it improbable that she continues to teach, type or operate phonographs except as a hobby. Married middle-class women were not, after all, expected to work. Still, the fact remains that Mina's childbearing abilities make her an important part of the defence against contagion, be it vampiric or otherwise, for without children, the race would perish. Sally Ledger writes, “[t]he crisis in gender definitions was accompanied by – and inextricably linked with – a crisis within the politics of empire” (31). To uphold the British empire, the country relied on a steady supply of men: soldiers, workmen, administrators, farmers. The furthering of the human species, of the British race and of the British race's position in an imperial world, all relied on women bearing children. This, of course, meant that “the New Woman's supposed rejection of motherhood” (Ledger 29) was directly tied to the success of empire; if women did not bear children, England did not retain its status as a great power. Mina, then, does her womanly duty and produces a son; a future upholder of fine, English virtues. In a post-colonial reading, she could therefore be seen as retaining her instrumental importance even through the epilogue.

From a feminist perspective, however, it can also be argued that Mina once more devotes her life and abilities to a man rather than herself; namely, her son. And in one respect, *Dracula* is strikingly similar to *The Sign*: women are praised heartily and defended with chivalric vigour, but they are ultimately subject to men's wishes, and their participation is strictly limited to helping men.

Mary Morstan's cleverness would never challenge Holmes' profession, and Mina will never insist on anything, despite outwitting five men even "when they are so earnest, and so true, and so brave" (330). Reading *Dracula* as a male quest romance, we find that women are not excluded, but that they seem to exist mainly in order to help, support and adore men. Alternatively, we may suppose from the text that transgressive femininity will be met with violence and possibly death. The fictional space created here provides men not only with an opportunity to act, overcome their fears and be heroic, but also with women who will never give them any true difficulty.

2.2 Hysterical Men With Animal Urges

Returning to the genre of male quest romance, I try to establish the connection between this fictional space and mental illness in order to show how such illness acts on masculinity as a potentially destabilising agent. Or rather, I ask what concerns regarding mental health are treated in *Dracula*, and how similar they are to those treated in *The Sign*. How do they affect the male characters? First, it is important to keep in mind the perceived crisis which was discussed in the introduction to this thesis, and that male quest romance was in part a literary response to this crisis. Therefore, I would argue that issues treated in this particular genre reflect genuine fears and concerns among men of the period; thus, if we know that men were concerned about mental illness and its effect on their masculinity (as Janet Oppenheim has shown in "*Shattered Nerves*"), we can expect this to appear as a theme in male quest romance texts. And *Dracula*, being rife with fears, concerns and paranoia, naturally also adds to this fictional discourse on troubles of the mind. In this section I show how troubled minds are treated in this particular vampire novel, and also draw some comparisons to how this is accomplished in *The Sign of the Four*.

An element of mental illness is present all through the novel in the form of Dr Seward's lunatic asylum, of course, where Renfield is the most prominent patient. Seward's early journal entries detail his patient's madness, in eating flies and other insects and hungering for blood, and as the Count moves closer Renfield's madness increases. He is thus an indicator of vampiric activity as well as a lunatic; indeed, he illustrates in a way the original meaning of the word – moon-sick, affected by the moon. When *Dracula* is near, Renfield is aggressive and violent; when the vampire has left to feed on Lucy, Renfield returns to his quiet collection. Of course Renfield has been driven mad by the vampire, and so is not any common type of patient one would expect to find in an asylum, but still he demonstrates fascinating aspects of the contemporary discourse on mental illness. During the *fin de siècle*, parts of the public were worried that civilisation was not as complete and stable as one would wish; that our primate ancestors were not completely evolved out

of our souls. There was concern that 'nature' might come bursting through in individuals, especially men, and so bring their animal urges and instincts to the fore. This would, one assumed, destabilise civilisation. Financial and industrial competition especially were thought to promote animal instincts and weaken the hold society's rules had over men: "Under control, competition was an impetus to civilization, but unchecked, it could reduce humanity to its frightful, natural state" (Oppenheim 157-58). In such an atmosphere, the presence of lunacy – of a man whose sanity was controlled by natural forces – must have spoken to readers' fear of losing control, or of succumbing to insanity despite their better intentions. Dracula does not only disturb and distort men and women's sexuality, as is discussed in the following section; he also disturbs their minds. Women, too, are at risk: Dracula calls to them, drawing Lucy out of her bed and Mina to his castle in Transylvania, controlling their dreams and their minds. The fear of being controlled by outside forces, be it the moon or a hypnotist, seems to be weighing heavily on men's minds in this novel.

As mentioned, the late-Victorian public worried over the struggle between nature and civilisation within man and within the nation. This struggle is not apparent only in Renfield's periodic insanity; the other men of the novel – even Van Helsing, the great wise father figure – experience instances of their animal traits coming to the fore, of their less refined urges attempting to dominate their actions. And in these cases, suggestively, women are usually the cause or the trigger of the men's moral lapses, textually linking this issue with male anxiety over female influence. This is an interesting contrast to *The Sign*, where Holmes' depression and other sufferings seem to have absolutely nothing to do with women. In *Dracula*, however, lunacy in men – we might call it 'irrational response to outside influences' – can be inflicted by women as well as a vampire. When Jonathan Harker is trapped in the castle with Dracula, the vampire sister brides – which name carries unpleasant hints of incest – advance on him with distinct sexual overtones. "He is young and strong; there are kisses for us all", the vampire woman says (*Dracula* 38), and the ensuing scene uses sexualised language to an extent which makes it read almost like erotica. "Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth," Jonathan observes as he waits with bated breath for their kisses (39). However, he has himself noted that his desire for their kisses is "wicked," and he hesitates to admit it even in his journal "lest some day it should meet Mina's eyes and cause her pain" (38). Glover suggests that the vampire women provoke in Jonathan the lust that he knows is indecent, and so he blames this errant behaviour on the women rather than himself (40). Of course, Jonathan is hypnotised and the vampires are sexually assaulting him, but it is the lust, the "wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips" (38) that is the breach of propriety here. We see how a combination of outside influences and his own animal urges combine to make Jonathan write of things he will later be ashamed of, admitting to lusts which are deemed

perverse.

This presents an interesting parallel to the text's historical context; socio-cultural historians have discussed how women's sexualities were thought to shape men's, and how a woman, by tempting a man, perverted his manly, chaste honour. Lucy Bland argues that even Karl Pearson, founding member of the Men and Women's Club debating society¹³, tended to see women as partially responsible for men's lack of sexual restraint (Bland 40). Frank Mort explains how the polarization of women's sexualities in turn shaped men's sexualities:

If the mid-nineteenth century witnessed the increasingly polarised representations of women around the definitions of asexual purity/immorality, these oppositions also had a profound impact on class-specific forms of male sexuality. ... [in pornography] the new physiological theories of the uncontrollable male instinct were incorporated into erotic fantasy. ... male desire [was constructed] as an illicit but physiologically based animal appetite, which drove men on to fresh excesses. (64-65)

In short, while women came to be seen increasingly as whore or Madonna, men came to be seen as animals barely contained in human form where sex was concerned. Female sexuality could evoke in men the lust they worked so hard to contain. Both Lucy threatening to tempt Arthur away from the others, and the three vampire women tempting first Jonathan and then Van Helsing by awakening “the very instinct of man” in them (*Dracula* 344), show feminine sexualities corrupting masculine ones. Though not exactly akin to madness, this is a sort of lunacy just the same: outside influences, namely women, make men mad and drive them to do and think things they would normally not do. This is, of course, precisely where the threat lies: in the destabilising effect on traditional views of masculinity, both of men's own lust and of women who provoke that lust.

Similarly, depression and other mental illnesses disturbed the late-Victorian man by suggesting that a man who suffered from them was less manly, less strong and able, than healthy men. On that note, a meaningful similarity between *The Sign* and *Dracula* is found in drug use among the protagonists. Holmes, in his disappointment with the world and all the creatures in it, fills his veins with cocaine. Seward, lovesick and sleepless, struggles to resist the temptation of “chloral, the modern Morpheus” (96). Both are forceful, intelligent men; both are depressed and liable to use chemical substances to alleviate their emotional pain. The correlation between substance abuse and mental illness is, of course, too complex to treat here; however, it is interesting that during fits of depression both Seward and Holmes reach for the needle. The difference is that Seward bravely resists. “No, I shall take none to-night! I have thought of Lucy, and I shall not

¹³ Progressive for its time, the Club was a forum of debate for questions of gender roles and relations between the sexes. As the name suggests, it admitted women members.

dishonour her by mixing the two” (96). Lucy is pure and sweet and inaccessible; to think of her while indulging in a morally unsound habit would connect her name with vice, which Seward refuses to do. This refusal is an act that, by the aforementioned Victorian standards of self-control, marks him out as even more manly than his courage and resolution do.

In these manly worlds of heroic deeds and exotic enemies, men's temptations can be managed and treated in various ways; vampires can be fought, women can be domesticated, and inner demons can be contained by rigorous self-control. However, Seward and Holmes both use drugs to distract themselves from their inner demons, and yet do not lose our sympathy as readers. Therefore, I would argue that both texts admit that sometimes, drugs seem to be all a man can resort to, because he has nothing else to distract him or to make him happy. These heroes are flawed, and we should not judge these men too harshly for it. It is as if both *Dracula* and *The Sign* help the reader to see shades of grey in relation to drug use, rather than the starkly black-and-white notions of right and wrong. Good men are not necessarily less good for a little weakness, although Seward seems to be very much aware that his drugs do not make him a better man. Clearly, he is reinforcing conventional masculinity where Sherlock Holmes is not; Holmes challenges Watson's middle-class propriety by flatly refusing to give up the cocaine.

Finally, perhaps the most threatening and debilitating aspect of mental illness in *Dracula* is the fact that it appears to be feminising the male characters in a narrative context. By feminised in this context, I mean that a male character is forced or led to assume traditionally feminine roles, such as being passive or unable to act, assuming the function of a prize or trophy (much like a fairy tale princess), or being the recipient instead of the provider of sexual attention. This is most apparent in Jonathan's reaction to his imprisonment at Castle Dracula, which bears some resemblance to the modern diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder: he does not sleep well, has frequent nightmares, suffers prolonged nervous prostration and is nervous, jumping at shadows. Mina worries that he will receive a shock, for “fear that some nervous fit may upset him” (160), and calls him “the poor dear” (161), as if he were a child. When he comes back from Transylvania, Jonathan is weak, nervous and confused. He strongly resembles the Victorian sufferers of “nervous breakdown” Oppenheim writes of in “*Shattered Nerves*”: their symptoms “often relegated once vigorous men and women to an invalid's sofa or sent them on prolonged travels in search of renewed vitality” (4). When Mina pleads with him to help her husband, Van Helsing assures her that he will make Jonathan's life “strong and manly” again so they can be happy (173). Despite hysteria being considered unmanly, as mentioned in Chapter 1, it is clear that Jonathan is suffering from the same symptoms as of that shameful disease – the very situation which, as discussed above, made doctors uneasy. Mina worries that “the very essence of [his] strength is gone” (148), and that the

increased amount of work following his inheriting the law firm makes him nervous so that he loses faith in himself. The fact that travels to exotic places, the very aspect of male quest romance which normally allows men to unfold and glorify their own masculinity in unrestricted spaces, is the cause of Jonathan's weakness, is striking. Here a young clerk has set out to build a career, and he returns a broken man with shattered nerves, his manliness gone. This, of course, comes from his experiences in Castle Dracula, with the Count and the three vampire sisters.

While in the castle, Jonathan doubts his own sanity because the things he experiences are too horrible to contemplate; “this dreadful thrall of night and gloom and fear” (46) makes him afraid he will lose his mind. While he is not actually physically harmed, Harker sees children taken by the vampires, the Count climbing walls like a lizard, the sister brides attempting to suck his own blood, and most of all, he is impressed with the sensation of being kept prisoner. He is overpowered by fear and “the unnatural, horrible net of gloom and mystery which seemed closing around [him]” (34), rendering him easy prey for the Count and his ladies. If we read *Dracula* as a Gothic novel, Jonathan Harker's role is obvious: he is the damsel in distress, captured in a sinister castle. This is the first time we are led to think of him in a feminine capacity; earlier Jonathan has clearly demarcated between himself and Mina, for example, by reminding himself that he must get the recipe for paprika hendl for her, not for himself (5) – she is the woman, and supervision of the kitchen will be her domain once they are married. As soon as he realises his predicament, however, there are several indications that Jonathan sees himself as more feminine than before, when he scorned the superstitions of the old lady at the inn, saying, “It was all very ridiculous” (8). First, when the fact that he is captive is made clear to him, Jonathan acts a little hysterically in the modern sense of the word: “When I found that I was a prisoner a sort of wild feeling came over me. I rushed up and down the stairs, trying every door and peering out of every window I could find” (28-29). He does not exhibit much self-control, that highest of the late-Victorian manly virtues. Then he realises that there is not much he can do about it, either: “What could I do but bow acceptance? ... The Count saw his victory in my bow, and his mastery in the trouble of my face” (33). Traditionally, women wait, while men act; when Jonathan must only passively await his fate, this suggests he is acting the part of a woman.

Second, and perhaps most interestingly, Jonathan himself likens himself to a woman twice: first, as he notes that his diary resembles *Arabian Nights*, thus putting the reader in mind of Scheherazade and her murderous husband (31), and second as he muses on who might have sat at a certain table before him, where “possibly some fair lady sat to pen, with much thought and many blushes, her ill-spelt love-letter” (37). By his words, Jonathan reminds us that he is navigating with difficulty the divide between femininity and masculinity; the gap is not that wide, apparently, as

Jonathan uses literary references to liken himself to a woman.

Third, it is not only in his captivity that Jonathan is passive, for he is also the weaker party when it comes to his dealings with the Count, the gypsies, and the three vampire women. The Count wishes them to stay up all night to talk of London, and Jonathan has no say in the matter. To begin with, he is ruled by professional duties, but as the Count's will takes hold of him, Jonathan finds he cannot ask to leave, or voice his suspicions, or even dictate his own letters. He is entirely at Dracula's mercy. When he first meets the vampire women, literary gender roles are truly reversed; the women advance on Jonathan with "deliberate voluptuousness" (39), while he waits "in an agony of delightful anticipation" (38) for them to kiss him – or bite, as it turns out. If we consider literary traditional gender roles in Gothic or fantastic literature, men are commonly heroes. Jonathan's position or role here, as the passive recipient of sexual attention, is similar to that of women in numerous examples of erotic literature, such as our modern romance novels, or for that matter *Fifty Shades of Grey*. As Tanya Pikula has shown, there are remarkable similarities between the passage of Jonathan's encounter with the sister brides, and earlier Victorian erotic literature; both in the static, repetitive language and in the imagery of a passive innocent being pursued and finally seduced by a hyper-masculine rake (Pikula 292-97). It is impossible to overlook the poignant reversal here; it is not some young woman lying paralysed on the sofa, but a man, ostensibly in the prime of his life. And the rakes are women; gross, unnatural women with penetrative powers – enough to drive a man mad, surely. And to add to Jonathan's complete helplessness, even the gypsies working in the castle will not help him; they laugh at his plight and leave him to his fate. Weak and waiting, Jonathan Harker is feminised completely, which leads to a nervous breakdown.

Now, as briefly discussed above, men were allowed a little breakdown if they had suffered severely; the six weeks of brain-fever Jonathan succumbs to after his escape are not what makes him unmanly. His experiences in Castle Dracula have unmanned him, and when he returns to England, he cannot regain his strength and return to manliness as long as he still doubts his own mind. Although first sister Agatha and then Mina take good care of him, Jonathan still wakes up shivering in the middle of the night; the care and comfort of women do not restore him to his former self. He remains prostrate by his trauma until Van Helsing enters the scene.

From the very first act of participation in the hunt for the Count, Jonathan begins to shake off his feminine nerves. "He was never so resolute, never so strong, never so full of volcanic energy" as when he has become a soldier in Van Helsing's little army (213). When he prepares for the hunt by gathering information about the Count's movements, Jonathan "came back full of life and hope and determination" (213), making his wife "so glad that I hardly know how to contain myself" (212). The moment Harker sees his wife has been attacked by Dracula, he immediately

begins to go after the vampire, “all the man in him awake at the need for instant exertion” (263), and only Mina's pleas can keep him from hunting the Count down at once, bold to the point of carelessness. Even when the brotherhood has the Count surrounded in his town house, Jonathan is the most active among them. “The first to act was Harker,” and he attacks the vampire with a large knife, uncaring whether it will do the cause any good (284); he is fiercely avenging his bitten wife. While he is ill, Mina calls him her poor dear; when their roles are reversed and Mina must be protected from further attack, Jonathan calls her his “poor darling” (275) and sets out to protect her honour and her purity. And the final test of his manhood, the last battle between men and monster, shows clearly how the young clerk has become a heroic adventurer. In Mina's admiring voice, we are told how her broken husband has regained his power and become equal to the practical and adventurous Quincey:

In the midst of this I could see that Jonathan on one side of the ring of men, and Quincey on the other, were forcing a way to the cart ... Nothing seemed to stop or even to hinder them. Neither the levelled weapons or the flashing knives of the gipsies in front, or the howling of the wolves behind, appeared to even attract their attention. Jonathan's impetuosity, and the manifest singleness of his purpose, seemed to overawe those in front of him; instinctively they cowered aside and let him pass. (349)

The second part of Jonathan's story, then, brings us back to the male quest romance. His imprisonment as a Gothic heroine ended, he joins a group of men promoting each others' interests and supporting a common cause, and reclaims his manhood. The fact that this reclaiming is dependent upon killing the creature who unmanned him in the first place, is highly significant. It truly literalises the phrase ‘facing one's demons’ in a perfect illustration of Sedgwick's definition of the Gothic – externalising conflicts usually considered internal. Being feminised brought Jonathan Harker to the edge of reason, but through the fraternity of his fellow hunters he kills the Count in the very land where he himself suffered, and is secure in his happy ending. Pursuing the Count to Transylvania brings the characters back into an exotic setting, strengthening the romantic element of the tale, and this last part of the novel is almost a recipe for male quest romance. Even Mina is slowly turning into a demon until they kill Dracula; for a few pages, there are no women part of their close-knit group, only a soul they hope to save. This transformation of the text, from Gothic paranoia to heroic homosociality, is an interesting allegory of how the genre may have arisen as according to Showalter. Feeling emasculated and imprisoned by New Women, literary realism and the spectres of mental illnesses and pathologised sexualities, male writers reacted by carving out a new space, going off on a quest for their lost masculinity, and taking control of their own identity.

2.3 “Your girls that you all love are mine already”

By Nissen's account, another form of male bonding narratives – the romantic friendship fiction – lost popularity around the *fin de siècle* (*Romantic Friendship Reader* 9-10), in large part because of the rising homosexual panic. The avid admiration of other men so common to the romantic friendship became suspect with the sexological classification of homosexuality; to delight in your friend's physical beauty, for example, was no longer compatible with ideals of masculinity. Ruth Robbins refers to the Wilde trials as a “temporal boundary” (137); a dividing line was at that point firmly drawn between manliness and homosexuality. By the time Stoker published his vampire novel, it appears that self-control was the absolute masculine virtue and that admiration for other men had become unfashionable. Therefore, the sheer strength of expression when men admire other men in *Dracula* is both surprising and amusingly suggestive, as we shall see in the quotes below.

When Van Helsing is treating Lucy and Arthur shows up unexpectedly, Seward notes that the older doctor was at first annoyed at the interruption, “but now, as he took in his stalwart proportions and recognized the strong young manhood which seemed to emanate from him, his eyes gleamed.” Van Helsing gleefully declares that “You are a man, and it is a man we want” (114), and later notes that Arthur, being young and strong, has blood so pure they do not even have to defibrinate it. When Quincey Morris arrives to help, Van Helsing is equally pleased. “A brave man's blood is the best thing on this earth ... You're a man, and no mistake” (141). Knowing that Seward loves Lucy, Van Helsing declares he loves *him* all the more for it; he says it again a chapter later to ensure we understood him. The younger men praise Van Helsing in return, even when they do not understand what he is asking them to do: “I don't quite see his drift, but I swear he's honest; and that's good enough for me”, says Quincey. He and Van Helsing shake on it (191). When Arthur has staked the undead Lucy, Van Helsing asks forgiveness for what he has led them to do. Arthur kisses his hand, saying, “Forgiven! God bless you that you have given my dear one her soul again, and me peace” (202). Then he cries into the professor's shoulder, and the band of brothers all shake hands and “promise to go on to the bitter end” (203) together. We know already that Arthur, Quincey and Seward have had adventures together, and that the two others throw Arthur an engagement party of sorts, to which they invite him effusively: “We promise you a hearty welcome, and a loving greeting, and a health as true as your own right hand” (60). Their friendship is already established; when Van Helsing joins the narrative, he makes firm friends of them all, and when Jonathan Harker is lastly welcomed into the pack, they greet him with similar warmth: “You will give me your hand, will you not? And let us be friends for all our lives” (176). The band of men to battle monsters is complete, and the final part of the narrative can commence.

First, however, I would point out that the male protagonists are more than a little eager to praise each others' manliness and other fine qualities. Even when Quincey proposes to be rash and disregard all careful planning, he pleases Van Helsing: "Brave boy. Quincey is all man, God bless him for it" (304). The above paragraph lists several other instances of their warm expressions towards each other. What makes this so interesting, is that *Dracula* was published only two years after the Wilde trials, and yet there are few signs of that temporal boundary of which Robbins writes. Not only do the brotherhood kiss each others' hands and comment on the fine quality of each others' bodily fluids, but there is a frequent use of sexually loaded words throughout the novel which inevitably leads the reader to connote to sex. The combination of the two, as we shall see, is to give not only the vampires, but also the brotherhood, a distinctly sexual meaning. The word 'voluptuous', which Pikelia has shown was frequently used in Victorian pornography, is used repeatedly in connection with female vampires. Roger Luckhurst has observed, in a note to the Oxford edition of the text, that the word 'sperm' already held its current meaning of 'semen', and yet it is used by Seward to describe candle wax during the staking scene in Lucy's tomb. Every time a vampire interacts with a human, there are sexual overtones to the encounter; Lucy's sensation of happily drowning, Mina drinking from Dracula's breast, the vampire women going on their knees before Jonathan, are all distinctly sexual.

I would go so far as to say that sex permeates the text; there is a sexual element to the very notion of vampirism, and *Dracula* does nothing to suppress this. And yet, in the midst of this sexually loaded atmosphere, barely two years after the Wilde trials, the novel does not hesitate to create an intensely homosocial milieu where men openly attest to each others' wonderfulness and frequently notice "the strong young manhood which seemed to emanate from" their manly friends. There is something subtly homoerotic in the way Van Helsing organises the draining of blood from three young, attractive men, and then adds his own to the mix. No trace of fear of homophobic blackmail is to be found; it is as if the text is proclaiming that the very notion is ridiculous, because these are all such strong, good, Christian, heterosexual men. Jonathan tells us that "Godalming and Seward are both happily married" (351) seven years later, but this is the only mention made of any women in the two men's lives. They barely warrant a clause in the epilogue. This mixture of androcentricity and sexual overtones is extremely interesting, both in terms of what was publishable at the time and of what was legal.

Indeed, if sexuality is treated as a cause for anxiety among men in the text, then said anxiety cannot be very debilitating. Unsanctioned forms of sexuality are explored graphically throughout the novel. Returning to Van Helsing's mixing of blood, one of the most explicit actions in the novel, this is clearly not a marital, procreative sexual activity. To begin with, Arthur is the only man to

“open his veins for her” (139); it is his right, as her prospective husband, to save her life. However, from the way Van Helsing advises Seward and Quincey not to say anything of their own sacrifices, we understand that saving her life is not all there is to it. There is intimacy and vulnerability in the act of giving blood; all three men have to lie down afterwards and eat – the loss of bodily fluids weakens them. The parallel is obvious. Seward reveals that there is pleasure in it, too; “No man knows till he experiences it, what it is to feel his own life-blood drawn away into the veins of the woman he loves” (120). Each man has thus mixed his bodily fluids with Lucy's; she is, in a way, married to all four – even Van Helsing. She has got her wish; they “let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her” (58), because the mixing of blood constitutes a marriage. Arthur tells us so himself: “he felt since then as if they two had been really married, and that she was his wife in the sight of God” (162). In addition to the men thus sharing Lucy in what can, with modern hypersexually tinted glasses, be read as something of an orgy, the blood transfusions make them brothers in a more biological sense of the word. Through the act of sharing a woman, the men bond; never was there a clearer illustration of Sedgwick's discussion of triangles, though this social formation, of course, has a few more corners.

Vampirism is, as mentioned, inherently sexual: a creature stealing another person's body fluids is hard to see as anything but. The interesting difference between blood transfusions and blood sucking, however, is that while the transfusions are described as something rewarding and privileged, a vampire's bite is an act of violence. Of course, there is a difference in giving voluntarily and having something forcibly taken; however, despite being weakened by the experience, the four men are proud and happy to give their blood. Mina and Lucy also lose their blood, but they are the worse off. There is, though, a marked difference: they are women. Women, being drained of something, sicken and perish; men, being drained of the same, rally and bond with other men. Similarly, Dracula never actually drinks from a man; we do not know what he did to the crew of the *Demeter*, but even if we infer that the Count drained every one of them, there is never any clear indication that he bites a man. Women, on the other hand, we know he takes; “through them you and others shall yet be mine”, he jeers at his opponents (285). And this is precisely what happens: Dracula does not bite any of Lucy's men, but when he drinks from her after the transfusions, is he not drinking their blood? He does not have to hunt men, because men voluntarily empty themselves into female containers, from which the vampire can feed. If vampirism is sexual, and Dracula drinks from men, that would indicate homosexuality; the text never touches upon that. However, Dracula explicitly states that he means to have the men as well, and though he has the blood filtered through a female body, it is still male. On that note, we may also recall that Dracula is not staked, like the female vampires: he is stabbed with a knife. Though it is true that he is also

stabbed through the heart and decapitated, the instrument of his demise is suggestive. Lucy and the sister brides are staked; a large piece of wood is driven through their bodies. Dracula is cut with a blade; the images invoked around his death are those of a surgery rather than a phallic penetration. He is castrated, incapacitated, but not penetrated by a figurative phallus. This would, in turn, lend itself to the argument that male and female sexuality are treated differently in this text, as men are clearly free to express their sexuality towards women, but not towards other men.

Frank Mort states, “Official discourses do have concrete, if complex and often bizarre, effects on the sexuality of constructed men and women” (3). This seems true for *Dracula* also; in the middle of a morally repressive period, the text seems to almost celebrate unsanctioned sexuality. The impression is almost one of defiance; as if censorship presented nothing more than an amusing dare. Bigamy, orgies, rape and gender play – the taboos abound; and they are not exclusively portrayed in a negative light. The one aspect of sexuality which is firmly tamped down, is the active female one, as was mentioned in 2.1. It is clear that the text is preoccupied with sexuality, but in what sense? Is it a tempting topic to explore or an element of threat, promising to destabilise masculine identities? At the very least, sexuality is admitted freely into the text, and exaggerated and made monstrous so as to allow for a greater scope of exploration. But simultaneously, nobody seems to find it at all odd that men can be so entirely devoted to each others' bodily fluids. Sexuality runs rampant, but there seems to be absolutely no question of responding to the indirect threat of having to perform heterosexuality in order to avoid accusations of homosexuality.

The latter is especially interesting when we compare it to the treatment of male-male relationships in the Sherlock Holmes canon. The men of *Dracula* are performing what David Glover calls “exalted heterosexuality,” around which several of Stoker's narratives are centred (20). They are intensely and insistently gendering themselves and each other by affirming that they all possess certain manly virtues, such as courage, discipline, resoluteness and loyalty. In Sherlock Holmes' world, the manliness seems less conventional; the hero is a recreational drug user, taciturn and Bohemian in nature, who lives rather outside society. In *Dracula*, the heroes are the very epitome of another Victorian ideal: muscular Christianity¹⁴. They fight for all that is good, they are men of action, and they frequently reiterate their reliance on religious support. “My only comfort is that we are in the hands of God,” Jonathan says (332). Van Helsing is certain they will prevail, “so sure as that God sits on high to watch over His children” (293). In short, this is also a performance of a specific type masculinity, and this performance does what Mary does to Holmes and Watson's relationships: it wards off accusations of deviant sexuality. The members of Van Helsing's

14 This particular type of masculinity is explained in depth by Pamela J. Walker in her essay “‘I live but not yet I for Christ liveth in me’: Men and masculinity in the Salvation Army 1865-90”. Bibliographical information can be found in the Works Cited list.

brotherhood can wax poetic about each others' fine qualities as much as they like, because their very manliness makes it ridiculous to suggest that they are in any way unmanly. To support this, we may consider the prejudices surrounding sexually deviant men at the time. Richard Kaye states, "The Wilde case hardened an increasingly commonplace link between homosexuality and an effeminate behaviour that in an earlier epoch simply had signalled aristocratic privilege and affectation" (60). If the public connoted homosexuality with effeminacy, then the sheer manliness of the brotherhood of light in *Dracula* renders them immune to any accusations.

In comparison to *The Sign of the Four*, *Dracula* seems to signal a more literal approach to male anxieties in the text, namely, to attack the sources of threat. Where the Holmes novel only promotes Mary Morstan's specific type of femininity and blandly ignores others, *Dracula* adds the presence of other types of femininity – and shows how these are firmly dealt with by a male hegemony. The idealised woman character is also present in *Dracula*, where her character is more developed, both because she has a narrative voice and because she is deeply involved in the story. While mental illness is more persistently explored in the vampire novel, the tone is not nearly so progressive; Jonathan's troubles must be overcome before he can ascend to true heroic status – he cannot simply be a suffering hero like Holmes, or have someone else solve his problems for him while he takes bed rest, like Holmes' clients. The demands upon men seem to have become heavier from *The Sign* to *Dracula*; where Holmes may keep his habit and his depression, Jonathan must make his life strong and manly again, and where Watson need only shoot a native islander, Seward must give his blood for the woman he loves. Some of this can, undoubtedly, be ascribed to plot differences, as it takes a little more effort to kill an ancient evil being than to catch a London criminal; however, it can also be read as an intensification of the male quest romance. This new quest requires more men, who are even stronger and braver, and an enemy who will be even harder to defeat. Sexuality, which was only vaguely hinted at in *The Sign*, adds to the confusion and Gothic mood of *Dracula*. Difficult women are no longer merely ignored, but brought to heel with large wooden stakes. The elements of male quest romance which were so rewarding in the Holmes novel, are present with a vengeance in *Dracula*; the anxiety has become a hands-on war against elements of instability. One thing which is repetitively similar, however, is the fact that the heroes are still all men, as befits any text belonging to a group of male bonding narratives. But while the men of *Dracula* reinforce traditional masculinity by killing vampires and refusing drugs, Sherlock Holmes allows for something of a diversity of masculine standards by being unconventional and still the hero of London. In this, we see the two texts approaching a destabilised masculine identity in two different ways, itself an indication that masculinity is a matter of plurality.

Conclusion

It proves surprisingly rewarding to read texts which are well established within one genre, as another genre entirely. The Gothic aspects of *Dracula* provide ample grounds for a critical analysis, but to consider it in light of the male quest romance is to open up new grounds of exploration. We can access fears and concerns far deeper than that of a vampire to be fought. Likewise, Sherlock Holmes in his popularity gives us reason to believe that not even literary heroes in men's stories were finding masculinity easy; detective stories are an amusing read, but the brooding sleuth makes possible other ideals of masculinity than the middle-class, married, respectably employed man. Therefore, he widens our perception of what masculinity means. I believe there are enough similarities between *The Sign of the Four* and *Dracula* that they can be read as belonging to the same genre; a genre which, upon examination, proves to be more nuanced and more worthy of critical attention than it may at first appear.

While writing this thesis, I have been asked why I did not choose more “serious” literature for such a project. The Sherlock Holmes stories, and to some extent *Dracula*, can be seen as frivolous because their main effect on the reader is often to entertain, and because they are typical ‘genre fiction’. However, as I have shown in the above chapters, a consideration of the texts’ historical context allows us to approach important questions through these narratives, precisely by acknowledging that they *are* entertaining and popular. The genre is possibly a continuation of the romantic friendship fiction so popular in America earlier in the century, and is far from extinct in our own entertainment industry. The ‘bromance’, perhaps more frequent in films and TV shows than in literature, is clearly a continuation of the male quest romance, showing many of the most important traits of the older genre. From this continuation alone, it is clear that this particular kind of men's stories have not lost their appeal or importance; their form changes, but vital aspects of their content do not. Men explore masculinity through contact with other men and through quests and challenges, and from this we may certainly conclude one thing: masculinity was never simple.

The notion that masculinity is complex, and is treated as such in male quest romances, was brought home to me by reading Elaine Showalter's accounts of the British *fin de siècle*. Showalter rather gives the impression, in her discussion of the male quest romance, that the genre is inherently misogynist, both in narrative and in publishing. Women, she claims, were excluded as readers, writers and protagonists alike. While a woman will never be the hero of a male quest romance, I find that this is less a matter of an active dislike of women and more a matter of a literary genre in which women are entirely optional. The main characteristic of these texts is the presence of men, not the absence of women. Women may act as direct threats to men's lives and happiness, as in

Rider Haggard's *She*, or as the vampire women in *Dracula*. However, they may equally well act as dispatchers and helpers, as in *The Sign of the Four* and also *Dracula*. We see that women are not simply excluded; they – and men's relationships with them – are explored in a literary space where men are in control, providing safe grounds for facing and challenging one's anxiety. This is also true for men's mental health, and their sexuality. Men's relations with other men, although presented in *Dracula* as a bulwark against evil, can simultaneously be the cause of suspicion and anxiety regarding men's sexualities, as in *The Sign of the Four*. In short, the genre is no more misogynist than it is homophobic or hostile to otherness in general. The texts belonging to it simply approach these issues in a variety of different ways clearly connected with the crisis of masculinity taking place during this time in Britain. In some women are outright dangerous; in others, pleasantly subordinated. In some narratives, mental illness is a haunting fear; in others, yet another layer of depth to a great man's character.

In conclusion, in this thesis I have demonstrated how we may use the study of literature to approach the topic of masculinity. Specifically, it is clear that masculinity as a basis for identity was not simple and monolithic during the British *fin de siècle*, any more than it is today. By reading these two texts as male quest romances, a genre so concerned with male anxiety, we can approach the construction of masculinity through literary criticism combined with socio-cultural history. Through this approach, we may conclude that the need for exploring one's gender identity has been pressing on men no less than on women. We also see that this need is still present in today's narratives as it was over a century ago, and not only in the modern adaptations of the Holmes stories, which are intensely focused on the Holmes-Watson dynamic (such as BBC's *Sherlock*, 2010, and Guy Ritchie's *Sherlock Holmes*, 2009). The brotherhood of *Dracula* is recognisable in the characters of *The Expendables* (Sylvester Stallone, 2010), for example; their morals have perhaps deteriorated, but these are still men gathered around a mission and driven by the plea of help from a woman. The island of 'Vilena' is as exotic as Transylvania, and both are beset by a fearsome enemy – although the rogue CIA agent from Stallone's film demands drugs, not blood, he is draining the land as surely as the vampiric Count.

The popularity and perseverance of the male quest romance, with its exploration of the male identity usually shown through challenges to be overcome, clearly indicates the validity and importance of the field of research briefly touched upon in this thesis. In the interest of equality, it is important that we recognise how men struggle to deconstruct, construct and investigate masculinity in literature, so that “gender studies” does not become synonymous with “women's studies.” Male quest romances, both modern and slightly older, will undoubtedly provide an interesting and refreshing direction for further studies of masculinity.

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