

# NINETEENTH-CENTURY GENDER STUDIES

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## Walking Aslant: Irene Adler Visits the Inner Temple

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<1>“A queer phenomenology might begin by redirecting or reorienting our attention toward queer moments,” or “moments at which the world appears ‘slantwise,’” Sara Ahmed theorizes (65). These moments in time are locatable in space in a variety of ways, including by following “desire lines,” a term that Ahmed borrows from landscape architecture. The term denotes “unofficial paths”: the traces of “everyday comings and goings” by which “people deviate from the [official] paths they are supposed to follow” (19). In this article, I follow a “desire line” mapped out in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s first Sherlock Holmes short story, “A Scandal in Bohemia” (1891). In this story, Irene Adler, identified by some scholars as a transgender figure, walks aslant across London in a “masculine costume” (Doyle 1.38). In Adler’s terminology, the costume constitutes everyday “walking clothes” (1.38).<sup>(1)</sup> During this journey, Adler engages in queer picaresque, to use a term that Júlia Braga Neves applies to the neo-Victorian lesbian heroine of Sarah Waters’s novel *Tipping the Velvet* (Neves 68). Set in an era of panic about and policing of sexuality and gender roles, “A Scandal in Bohemia” features a transmasculine character in Adler, and a plot surrounding their transmasculinity as captured in a photograph. At the end of the story, their visit to the exclusively cisgender male space of the Inner Temple is a queer self-liberatory act, as well as a transgression of *fin-de-siècle* society’s mores and laws.

<2>The most cataclysmic queer moment of Adler’s picaresque is this brief and critically overlooked one. Adler, having left Baker Street, visits the Inner Temple, one of the four Inns of Court that constitute the nerve center of the British legal profession. In 1888, when “A Scandal in Bohemia” takes place, the Inns were strictly male-gendered spaces, but women vociferously campaigned to access them as part of the quest for gender equality. Adler walks in “masculine costume” from Baker

Street to, and then inside, the Inner Temple (Doyle 1.38). As they walk there to visit their lover, Godfrey Norton, their walk follows a “desire line.” The fact of Adler’s “masculine costume” during this walk allows us to make sense of several plot points that otherwise might seem inconsistent or implausible. Adler’s visit to this space while legible as a man undermines the cisgender male monopoly on it by opening it up to incorporate a transmasculine visitor. This visit proves transformative for Adler and for the Sherlock Holmes transmedia universe, which since the nineteenth century has come to include films, television, and manga adaptations that build on Conan Doyle’s original novels and short stories. Specifically, Adler, through their journey in masculine “walking clothes,” gives the transmedia universe that continues to be created around Sherlock Holmes a transmasculine character. As we will see, Adler’s transmasculinity has been recognised by creators of Sherlock Holmes adaptations and spinoffs. It is now an indelible aspect of the Holmes transmedia universe.

### **Adler’s Transmasculinity**

<3>Critics increasingly read Adler as a transgender figure. Elizabeth Carolyn Miller finds Adler’s gender identity to be “radically double” and attributes to Adler a “transsexual” (in this context, *travesti*) “performance” (26). Of the Sidney Paget illustration of Adler in “walking clothes” addressing Holmes, Miller observes that “if the image existed apart from the story, one might interpret the scene as dangerous, shady, or queer” (25–26). Constance Crompton proposes that Adler “is not cisgendered” (par. 15). Applying Jack Halberstam’s theory of female masculinity to “A Scandal in Bohemia,” Crompton observes that Adler is, even in women’s dress, “a *masculine* heterosexual woman” whose female masculinity transcends costume and “remains consistent throughout the story” (par. 15). Crompton points out that Adler’s gender expression extends beyond their clothing and entails their gait (par. 7). Adler is unfazed by the street fight outside Briony Lodge arranged by Holmes, suggesting that they have been in such situations before, more customary for someone who reads as male in the street. Adler’s comfort in their masculine appearance offers another reason why Holmes does not recognize the “slim youth in an ulster”—Adler—who salutes him in Baker Street (Doyle 1.35). This failure of recognition has more to do with Adler than with Holmes, who in the earlier adventure *A Study in Scarlet* is easily able to detect that the expatriate American murderer Jefferson Hope has strategically disguised himself as an old woman. Adler, however, being comfortably and habitually masculine, evades Holmes’s vaunted attention to nuance. For Adler, therefore, masculinity is not just a costume.



Fig. 1. Sidney Paget. "Good-night, Mr. Sherlock Holmes."  
*The Strand*, 1891. *Wikimedia Commons*.

<4>A constellation of artistic collaborators produce and reinforce Adler's masculinity. Crompton points out that Adler's "textual gender" is created to a great extent by Sidney Paget's illustrations, especially the one captioned "good-night, Mr. Sherlock Holmes" (fig. 1). "A Scandal in Bohemia," as first published in *The Strand*, demonstrates that even cisgender, culturally conventional late-Victorians such as Doyle, Paget, and Newnes were capable of "recogni[zing] a variety of gender expressions" (par. 35). This capability might be due in part to the 1870 trial of Stella Boulton and Fanny Park, "people of trans feminine experience" (Heaney 163) brought to court for conspiracy to commit sodomy (McKenna 35).<sup>(2)</sup> Doyle was

certainly aware of the case, for it was not only sensationally covered by the popular press (Heaney 163), but also by *The Lancet*, the medical journal of record, which was pruriently interested in what British medical practitioners could learn from Fanny and Stella about sodomy (McKenna 205; Barrell 189).<sup>(3)</sup>

<5>Adler's transmasculinity is central to the suspense plot of "A Scandal in Bohemia." The King hires Holmes to help him obtain from Adler, his former lover, a "cabinet photograph" of himself and Adler that proves they were lovers. At the end of the story, in Briony Lodge, Holmes discovers a photograph of Adler "in evening dress" (left by Adler for him). When the King sees this other photograph, he says it is not the cabinet photograph he seeks. Watson, the representative Victorian gentleman, does not point out anything unusual about the second photograph; were it of Adler in menswear, he would surely have said so. Since the photograph goes unremarked by Watson, we can assume that Adler's "evening dress" in the Briony Lodge photograph is womenswear. In the cabinet photograph, by contrast, it is possible that Adler wears masculine dress.

<6>The possibility that Adler is dressed as a man in the photograph the king seeks is first raised by the King of Bohemia himself. In his original consultation with Holmes, the King remembers his relationship with Adler queerly. He tells Holmes that he fears association with Adler so profoundly, he has hired people to commit various crimes, including trespassing and robbery, to prevent Adler from revealing something about their relationship that he does not name. His hired thugs have physically assaulted—"waylaid and searched"—Adler in public twice, and twice burglarized Adler's home, Briony Lodge (Doyle 1.30). The reason the King states for fearing blackmail—that his intended queen would be upset to learn he had once had a mistress—is disproportionate to the magnitude of his paranoia and the violence of his actions. Many kings have openly allied themselves with mistresses. Scholars have identified the relationship between Prince Edward (the future Edward VII, alias "Bertie") and actress Lillie Langtry as the model for the King of Bohemia's affair with Adler. However, it was only Langtry's reputation that suffered when her royal lover abandoned her; the king's did not whatsoever. Certainly, his former entanglement had no impact on his marriageability. What could explain the King of Bohemia's extreme secrecy about Adler, and the unconvincing plot point of his flimsy explanation?

<7>Unlike royal unchastity, upper-class Victorian men's deviations from cisgender heterosexuality certainly impelled secrecy, subterfuge, and the type of paranoia Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, appropriating an early-twentieth-century psychoanalytic term, calls "homosexual panic" (182). Stella Boulton's romantic partner, Lord Arthur

Pelham-Clinton, M.P. for Newark, age twenty-nine and a son of the Duke of Newcastle, died immediately after her arrest. The cause of Pelham-Clinton's death was officially recorded as scarlet fever, but rumors of suicide began to leak almost immediately, and are, according to scholars, highly plausible, if not certain (McKenna 250–54). This was one of several mid-Victorian historical overreactions to queerness. Another homosexual sex scandal was rumored to have actually involved a British royal only two years before the publication of "A Scandal in Bohemia." The "Cleveland Street" scandal erupted in 1889, the year after the King of Bohemia comes to Holmes for help. It was whispered that one of the men apprehended at the secret homosexual brothel in Cleveland Street was Queen Victoria's grandson, Prince Albert Victor, Duke of Clarence and Avondale, then the Crown Prince (Hyde 55; Hibbert 313). The Duke of Clarence's death from tuberculosis in January 1892, six months after the *Strand's* publication of "A Scandal in Bohemia" (July 1891), nullified potential political ramifications of this gossip, but it is without doubt that in the 1890s, deviation from cisgender heterosexuality was dangerous, even for royalty.

<8>Doyle subtextually signals that "A Scandal of Bohemia" is invested in discourses of queerness by associating his fictional King with the central European region of Bohemia. In nineteenth-century London, "Bohemian" was sometimes a codeword for the queer or genderqueer. Crompton notes that Doyle employs "Bohemia" as a pun, wanting readers to think of London's Bohemia, the zone or culture of artistic and sexual experimentation. One real-life example of queer London Bohemianism was the journalist, novelist, and playwright George Augustus Sala. A covert writer of gay erotica and participant in the "eroticised fraternalism" of London club culture, Sala was the constant subject of rumor and, by the 1880s, had become an exemplar of Bohemian life (Black 26). A "King of Bohemia" such as Sala might have been expected to participate in queer activities. If Doyle's King of Bohemia needs to appear heterosexual to his queen and constituency, he starts out as compromised by his very title.

### **The Cabinet Photograph**

<9>The reason Adler is so especially dangerous to the King's marriage and regime is that the cabinet photograph most likely shows them in "masculine costume," or "walking clothes," like the habit that Holmes and Watson see in Baker Street. Adler has often seemed queer to critics and creatives. Lawrence Frank proposes that Doyle modeled Adler in part on the French actress Rachel, including by characterizing Adler with Rachel's careful "elud[ing] of gender and language to occupy the realm of the unspeakable" (54). Caroline Reitz finds Adler "a kind of [gender] hybrid,"



and argues that Adler occupies a masculine role similar to that of women detectives in early female-detective mysteries (431). In the 1984 Granada Television adaptation of “A Scandal in Bohemia,” the first episode of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, starring Jeremy Brett as Holmes, Adler (Gayle Hunnicutt) cross-dresses in the presence of the King of Bohemia. Though in Granada’s adaptation the incriminating photograph shows Adler wearing an evening gown, they visit a nightclub in male dress with the King, where the couple watches a female burlesque performance together. The camera lingers on Adler’s gaze focusing on the dancers, then moves to the King’s face. In costume and pose, Granada’s Adler and the King read as two men—in fact, as two romantically involved men.[\(4\)](#)

<10>In Doyle’s story, the King’s extreme apprehension suggests that Adler wears masculine clothing in the incriminating photograph. In the 1880s, the King would absolutely have cause to fear the publication of such a photo. During Fanny and Stella’s trial, photographs presented as evidence include cabinet portraits of Stella and Pelham-Clinton, sometimes with Fanny Park as well, and sometimes not. In one of these images, Stella wears men’s clothing and in another, she wears a woman’s gown and hairstyle (pictured and discussed in Carriger 150). The King of Bohemia’s words about the cabinet photograph of Adler and him might well be applied to that of Stella and Pelham-Clinton: they are “both in the photograph” (Doyle 1.17). Pelham-Clinton’s situation is different from the King of Bohemia’s because Pelham-Clinton risked being revealed as a male homosexual *and* the lover of a cross-dresser, whereas the King of Bohemia risked being revealed as the lover of a man. If the cabinet photograph of Adler and the King suggests that the King is attracted to a masculine person, then the crimes that the King commits to obtain the hidden photograph do not seem so excessive, or as comparatively risky to him. In fact, no other likely detail of a photograph of Adler and the King would place the King in as much danger as the very crimes he commits to suppress it.

<11>One more plot detail of “A Scandal in Bohemia” makes more sense if the cabinet photograph depicts two masculine individuals. Once the King finds out that Adler has married Godfrey Norton, the King declares that “the photograph is now as safe as if it was in the fire”—that is, *he* is safe from the photograph’s possible impact (Doyle 1.39). Why would Adler’s marriage, to a lawyer, no less, make the King feel less vulnerable to blackmail, public embarrassment, or criminal prosecution? Watson also believes that Adler’s love for Norton protects the King of Bohemia, but why would that be so? The most logical explanation depends upon Adler’s masculine “walking dress” as an essential aspect of their legible social being. If Adler appears masculine enough to cause trouble by association for a reigning monarch, similar trouble would await a lawyer. Were the cabinet photograph of Mrs.

Godfrey Norton to be published, Mr. Godfrey Norton would be as vulnerable to allegations of sodomy as was Sir Arthur Pelham-Clinton, MP, in 1870. The photograph's suppression protects the man whom Adler loves, and so can no longer be circulated by Adler without hurting their new lover—provided, of course, that Adler's masculinity is intelligible in it.

### **No Room at the Inns**

<12>This brings us to Adler's final perambulation of London on the evening before the newlyweds' sudden departure. In walking around London, the fluently and comfortably transmasculine Adler anticipates what Neves, referring to Waters's neo-Victorian novels, calls "queer picaresque." According to Neves, Waters "queers the picaresque plot by both introducing a lesbian protagonist and also by shifting the picaro's ambition [away from] class ascension" toward other subversions of hegemonies (68). On the last of Adler's picaresque excursions, they leave Briony Lodge, follow Holmes from St. John's Wood to Baker Street, and then go to "the [Inner] Temple" to see Norton.<sup>(5)</sup> Adler later tells Holmes by letter, "I followed you to your door, and so made sure that I was really an object of interest to the celebrated Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Then I, rather imprudently, wished you good-night, and started for the Inner Temple to see my husband" (Doyle 1.18). It is important to remember that the Inner Temple was an exclusively male space and that Adler enters it specifically for the purpose of being with their lover.

<13>Consequently, this final leg of Adler's journey, the excursion to the Temple, is a remarkable genderqueer provocation. It is one of the "queer moments" in a "text where the world no longer appears the 'right way up'" and instead offers more liberatory orientations (Ahmed 66). Adler walks a long way in masculine costume. The portion of the journey from Holmes's Baker Street residence to the Inner Temple alone is 2.8 miles, walked via the shortest route, through populous Marylebone, and possibly Bohemian Soho.<sup>(6)</sup> On this journey, we can deduce that no one accosts Adler: they report neither being stopped and questioned nor harassed. As "we only notice the arrival of those who appear 'out of place'" (Ahmed 9), Adler appears in place on this path and, in so doing, makes it a queer space.

<14>Adler's walk subverts English law, policy, and culture at one of its most ritualized sites: the ancient center of the legal system—also in the 1870s and 1880s a site of contest about gender equity. We must understand the history of the Inns of Court with respect to gender. The four Inns of Court (Lincoln's Inn, Grey's Inn, the Middle Temple, and the Inner Temple) formed the capitol of lawyerly London. To qualify for admission to the bar, Victorian Barristers had to belong to one of the Inns

for three years, not only as a student but also as a domestic resident. After this residency, barristers were encouraged to keep chambers at the Inns, especially during the late Victorian era, when a drop-off in regular occupancy by qualified barristers created financial problems for the Inns. Throughout the era, “barristers, law students,” and clerks kept these “residential chambers,” as did a few men of other professions. Women could occupy them only as “house servants, known as laundresses” (Pepitone 91). Norton’s “chambers” (Doyle 1.22) are certainly residential. After Norton and Adler’s wedding at St. Monica’s, Norton goes to the Temple and is there at night, after Holmes’s return home, when it is dark enough that neither Holmes nor Watson can see the “slim youth” well. Moreover, the visit takes place on Adler and Norton’s wedding night. Doyle might imply that Adler, dressed as a man, plans to sleep with Norton, a man, in the male-only space of the Temple. Such would be a fascinatingly provocative moment of queer sexuality between a cisman (the King of Bohemia) and a transmasculine person who challenges the rules of the Temple and defies the legal system that the Temple upholds.

<15>Furthermore, this provocation takes place at a time of sensational challenges to the Temple’s male exclusivity. In the late nineteenth century, white-collar women proliferated. As residency, office space, and social club combined, the four Inns constituted an adamantly male homosocial institution where women were not allowed. As the Inns’ modern urban anthropologist Ren Pepitone explains, throughout the Victorian era and well into the twentieth century, the Inns of Court “epitomized a homosocial culture of affective same-sex bonds” (88). In an 1866 fiction serial, a Temple porter turns away an indigent woman. “I wonder she ain’t ashamed of herself,” he says to himself. “[S]he knows as no females is admitted to the Temple after ten—unless—Well, she didn’t offer nothing” (Rymer 6). Only bribery, it seems, can circumvent this rule. The Inns’ “architectural spaces and embodied practices inducted members of the bar into a resolutely English, masculine sociability” (Pepitone 91). In a way, the Inns are the establishment’s doppelgänger of London’s Bohemia. Nostalgic accounts of Inn residency claim that Victorian and Edwardian barristers “regularly quoted poems by William Makepeace Thackeray and Tom Taylor—who shared chambers at the Inner Temple—to cast the societies as a homey refuge of fraternity inhabited by impoverished, literary bohemians” (91). Barristers felt threatened by the rise of white-collar women workers more than by other women. Early twentieth-century legal historians extolled the Inns’s all-male society while satirizing the pretensions of white-collar women (Pepitone 101). Behind the walls of the Inner Temple, barristers could pretend that modernity was not, in fact, impending.



<16>However, at that time, the Temple was bombarded by women aspiring to join the legal profession. In 1888 London, no barristers were women. By law, from 1842 until the passage of the Sex Disqualification (Removal) Act of 1919, women were barred from becoming lawyers (Baines 63). In that era, “the essential prerequisite to becoming a lawyer before 1919 was being male,” and to reiterate this point, legal authorities and educators often cited “the *Mirror of Justices*, a medieval treatise, written by an unknown person, stated that the law would ‘not suffer women to be attorneys, nor infants nor serfs’” (Baines 63 discussing Whittaker and Maitland 88). Women were barred from the Bar in ways that went beyond regulations: a wig was a required component of the barrister’s uniform, even as it is today. The “[w]earing of seventeenth-century male wigs and gowns, and the not shaking of hands” were among the “traditions . . . used as a tool to continue excluding women” from the culture of the legal profession even “once they had joined in 1919” (Baines 69). However, during the *fin-de-siècle*, the male-exclusivity of the legal profession in Britain saw a series of cultural and legal challenges (Bourne). Women gained access to the medical profession first, in a variety of capacities, such as nursing, midwifery, and pharmacy. By the 1880s, “women’s increasing access to higher education meant that a number of them had completed university degrees in law,” though they could not yet join the Bar (Mossman 116). Several British and imperial women tried. Among them were Letitia Alice Walkington of Ireland in 1889 and Frances Helen Gray of England in 1890 (Albisetti 833). Cornelia Sorabji, the first alumna of Bombay University, studied law at Oxford in 1888–1892. She failed to convince the Bar to accept her despite the patronage of Oxford celebrity don Benjamin Jowett (833). In 1891, the year that “A Scandal in Bohemia” was published in *The Strand*, one Miss Day tried (833). Meanwhile, Eliza Orme, who took her LLB (Hons.) at the University of London in 1871 and her external degree in 1888, began practicing law in 1875 with a female partner as the firm of Orme and Richardson. Technically, Orme and Richardson were “quasi-lawyer[s] or legal assistants[s],” but their Chancery Lane chambers probably seemed visually as legitimate as any other law practice in the neighborhood (Baines 73). In 1873, the suffragist Maria Grey and ninety-two other women collectively petitioned the Council of Legal Education to admit women to Lincoln’s Inn. Their petition failed but was covered by the press (Baines 70). As the legal historian Judith Baines has shown, these were not isolated occurrences: women, particularly those identified as suffragists or as New Women, organized to demand access to the Inns of Court “as part of a larger drive for the legal recognition of women’s personhood” (71). Women lawyers in the Temple would prove that women are capable of citizenship.

<17>As Frank observes, in “A Scandal in Bohemia,” Doyle “raises the issue of the place of women in *fin de siècle* culture” and makes this issue central to the story

(Frank 53). Adler intervenes by walking, in “walking clothes,” from Holmes’s home to, and then inside, the Inner Temple. The legal system that Adler infiltrates would sex Adler as female—if it could identify Adler as female. Adler’s walking clothes significantly complicate that endeavor. They foil the lawyers’ attempts to preserve their all-male space, or at least its presumed cisness. They also transform it into a secretly queer space and a different kind of Temple, dedicated to radical love.

### **Adler Versus the Temple**

<18>By visiting the Temple in masculine dress and posing for their wedding night with a lawyer who resides there, Adler questions the rigidity of a gender binary paradigm that facilitates the Temple’s exclusion of women from both the legal profession and full humanity. That “the culture of the Bar—concentrated, enduring and pertinaciously masculine” was the “example par excellence of the gendered operations of Victorian professional life” makes Adler’s sojourn at the Inner Temple as a transmasculine individual an assault on cisgender heterosexual male privilege (Pepitone 88). Comfortably, fluently masculine, Adler achieves what the various legal challengers of the 1870s–1900s did not: access to the male preserve that cisgender women sought.

<19>Adler’s presence at the Inns of Court at night queers that space. Michelle Liu Carriger has pointed out that the gender-transgressive behavior that precipitated Fanny and Stella’s 1870 arrest “took place not in the closet . . . but in the very center of respectable society . . . in the center of the city, in the center of middle-class social circles, in the center of attention” (138). Fanny and Stella’s public behavior exposed them to allegations of homosexual activity. Adler’s arrival at the Temple and encounter with Norton in that semipublic space may have seemed phenomenologically similar to those of the other lawyers, clerks, students, and laundresses in attendance. Why would a “slim youth” visit a barrister in his residential chambers at night? Lovers married only hours earlier, Norton and Adler may have appeared intimate. After the Labouchere Amendment and the Cleveland Street scandal, the media-reading British public might have suspected such a visit to have a sexual exigency. Moreover, Norton is no actor: his ease with Adler was apparent when Holmes spied upon them at Briony Lodge. By visiting Norton at night at the Temple in this context, Adler queers Norton: suddenly legible as a man who has sexual relations with men, he becomes as vulnerable to blackmail as the King of Bohemia.

<20>Unlike the King, Norton does not resist his Bohemianization. Whether he leaves for the European Continent with Adler out of fear of Holmes and the King’s

persecution, or because other lawyers have seen him at night at his chambers with a “slim youth” in the aftermath of the Labouchere Amendment, he throws his lot in with Adler and chooses exile. Adler claims their flight is precipitated by their discovery that the King of Bohemia has employed Holmes to steal the cabinet portrait. “I had been warned against you,” Adler writes in the letter left at Bryony Lodge. “I had been told that, if the King employed an agent, it would surely be you. . . . Yet . . . you made me reveal what you wanted to know,” namely, the photo’s location (Doyle 1.38). However, Norton has his own reasons for leaving the country, which emerge when Adler enters the Temple to find him. From a solicitor with a decidedly Norman name, financially equipped to keep residential chambers, a paragon of English privilege, Norton becomes an exile from both his country and the Inns of Court, after the night of his marriage. Like Orme, Sorabji, and the other women who qualified for the Bar but were not allowed to join it, he can perhaps practice law, but he can no longer belong to the British metropole’s legal confraternity.

<21>Incidentally, perhaps, rumors suggested that in 1870, Sir Arthur Pelham-Clinton, lover of transfeminine Stella Boulton, had only faked his death, and actually gone into exile abroad. Neil McKenna, Fanny and Stella’s definitive biographer, maintains that it was “quite possible . . . that in New York Stella was reunited with Lord Arthur Clinton” (McKenna 343). Adler’s “aslant” excursion irrevocably queers Norton and sends him into exile from both the Inns of Court and Britain. Doyle gives us a transgender man who gains unauthorized access to the Temple via fluent, authentic masculinity undetected by Holmes—a transgender man whose gender identity is integral to the way that other characters in the story behave. More importantly, by slanting into the Temple, Adler goes a little way towards putting the unjust world to rights.

### **Transmedia Slantwisdom**

<23>Finally, Adler’s transmasculinity is so evidently present in Doyle’s story, it turns up in multiple other transmedia instantiations of the Sherlock Holmes universe. Transmedia is “a process where integral elements of a fiction” are “dispersed” across various media, with each media “making its own contribution” to the story-world (Jenkins n.p., discussed in Haugtvedt, “‘Sweeney Todd’ as Victorian Transmedia Storyworld” 444). The Sherlock Holmes storyworld is a transmedia one. In “A Scandal in Bohemia,” Doyle focuses intently on the question of Adler’s gender identity and shows more than once that their gender is inscrutable to Holmes. Watson constantly genders Adler female, more so than any other character about whom he writes. Even before naming Adler, “[t]o Sherlock Holmes, she is

always *the* woman,” Watson begins. “In his eyes, she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex” (Doyle 1.7), not because Adler is a model of femininity, but because Adler is his one unsolved problem, his provocateur, and his enigma. Holmes follows Watson’s pronoun usage. For instance, during the fire scene, he assumes that when Briony Lodge is threatened by fire, Adler’s gaze will reveal the location of the cabinet photograph because a woman looks to her child, and, if she is childless, to her most valuable possession. Adler *does* look towards the photograph’s hiding place, but it does not stand to reason that this is a sign of femininity. The fact that the most notorious blackmailers of the era were men would have told Doyle that. Rather, this gaze toward the photograph is suggestive of Adler’s capacity to blackmail the King, and thus their participation in a markedly masculine—in this case, transmasculine—practice of blackmail.

<24>Adler consumes Holmes’s attention specifically by remaining illegible to him. His failure to obtain the cabinet photograph before Adler and Norton remove it from Britain proves acceptable only by the *noblesse oblige* of the King, who is relieved that Adler is now married and unwilling to harm him, probably due to more than loving “a better man than” him (Doyle 1.37), but because any blackmail targeting the King would also harm Norton. As Watson tells us, for some time after Adler’s outwitting of him, Holmes genders Adler not only as a woman but also as “*the* Woman” (Doyle 1.5). Yet, as Emma Heaney reminds us, transgender people have long been irrationally subjected to “credential[ing]” by cisgender people (xvi). Holmes also might not even remember Adler correctly. Watson’s indirect address memorializes “the late Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable memory” (Doyle 1.7). Even the word “late” is mysterious: Adler might be deceased, or vanished into the marital identity of Mrs. Godfrey Norton. “Irene Adler” may have adopted another identity, in order to authentically and joyously live. Despite Holmes’s best deductions, Watson’s most studious representations, and perhaps even Doyle’s authorial intentions, Adler opens a space of queer, aslant picaresque in the notoriously sexist and homophobic environment of late Victorian London.

<25>Adler invites readers to keep queering the Sherlock Holmes universe. Doyle’s canon is the inciting text of a transmedia phenomenon, in which characters exist independently of their texts and authors (Haugtvedt, *Transfictional Character and Transmedia Storyworlds* 166). In this transmedia universe, Adler’s queer sensibility may be recycled to clear more space for queer experiences and individuals in (neo-)Victorian London. “When bodies take up spaces that they are not intended to inhabit,” as Adler does, “something other than reproduction of the facts of the matter happens” (Ahmed 62). Sometimes, these “spaces in turn acquire new bodies” (62). This is happening, now, in the cultural space of the Sherlock Holmes universe.

Contributors to that universe often represent Adler as a queer character; for instance, in Ryōsuke Takeuchi’s globally popular manga serial *Moriarty the Patriot* (2016–), Adler is transman secret agent “James Bonde.” Illustrations that directly reference Paget’s, including a copy of “Good-Night, Mr. Holmes,” affirm that this transmasculine Adler of the manga *is* the canonical Adler. In retrospect, it is not just Adler’s walk that is “aslant.” For readers and future contributors to the Sherlockian transmedia tradition, the walk slants the entirety of Holmes’s storyworld.

## Notes

(1) This article employs no gender-specific third-person pronouns to describe Adler because “A Scandal in Bohemia” does not specify exactly how Adler self-identifies privately or in the safe company of Godfrey Norton. For Adler, I use she/her pronouns only in quotations. (△)

(2) In naming and assigning pronouns to Stella Boulton (Lady Clinton) and Fanny Park, I follow the example set by Emma Heaney. See, for instance, Heaney 162–63. Some scholars have gendered Fanny and Stella male and/or denominated them by the male names they were assigned at birth. I do the same only in quotations. (△)

(3) The trial of Fanny and Stella was “the most significant media sensation to address sex between male assigned people until Oscar Wilde’s 1895 trial” (Heaney 163). (△)

(4) Granada Television’s adaptation of “A Scandal in Bohemia” is much closer to the canonical story than the BBC’s *Sherlock* (2011–2014)’s Irene Adler, who is, as Judith May Fathallah astutely puts it, “a self-professed lesbian who apparently turns straight due to the irresistible sex appeal of Sherlock” (59). (△)

(5) By this point in the story, Holmes has already ascertained that Norton’s Inn is “the Inner Temple” (Doyle 1.22). (△)

(6) Walk tested *in situ* in August 2022. Mileage confirmed in June 2023 using Google Maps. (△)

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