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A Comparative Analysis of Enola Holmes and Sherlock Holmes

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Abstract

Arthur Conan Doyle's famous fictional detective Sherlock Holmes is an icon of the detective genre and has been adapted into various media and reimagined in countless stories and novels. Nancy Springer's *Enola Holmes Mysteries* (2006-2010) adapts and expands the Sherlock Holmes universe, and centres on a female protagonist, Enola, who, as Sherlock's sister, becomes a detective specialising in locating missing individuals and items.

This chapter explores the influence of the original Sherlock on Enola's character and examines the extent to which the author, Springer, modifies these influences. The argument presented here is that Enola embodies a combination of traits, highlighting the significance of her distinct personality in shaping her detective work. To do so, this chapter employs comparative analysis to delve into the character of Enola Holmes by first analysing the traits and investigative methods Enola shares with her predecessor and then showing where Springer deviates and develops distinctive traits and abilities for Enola that demarcate her from Sherlock. Eventually, Enola is shown as a detective with her own identity and methodologies, elevating her beyond a mere replica of Doyle's Holmes.

Keywords

Sherlock Holmes, Enola Holmes, adaptation, investigative techniques

Introduction

Numerous adaptations and rewrites of Sherlock Holmes stories (or simply the character) have been made to date. Readers have maintained a strong desire to read more of the established formula of conventional detective fiction embodied by Holmes, and the fascination with Sherlock Holmes has not abated. As a result, he continues to be imitated, adapted, and rewritten. These reinventions have also gone beyond continuations in recent years, significantly diversifying the Sherlock Holmes universe with new additions that expand its scope. Despite the creative diversifications, a significant number of these reinventions incorporate characteristics of Sherlock found in the original Sherlock Holmes short stories and novels by Arthur Conan Doyle. This means that even as these narratives take on new forms, they often preserve the essence of Holmes as a character by incorporating familiar traits. The maintained characteristics of Sherlock often include his exceptional intelligence, an interest in science – primarily chemistry –, advanced reasoning methods – commonly referred to as the deductive method, but more accurately described as the

inductive method (Knight 86) –, observation skills, a commitment to rationality, proficiency in acting and disguise, and boredom leading to drug use when not engaged in complex investigative cases.

However, as Polasek notes, “the attributes of the character [Sherlock Holmes] are merely at the disposal of each adaptation, which will both draw on them and rewrite them” (3). In other words, adaptations and rewrites may preserve some of Sherlock’s traits while introducing new elements to create a blend. Therefore, this chapter focuses on tracing Sherlock’s investigative techniques in the character of Enola in *The Enola Holmes Mysteries* and on identifying characteristics added by the author to differentiate the character.

In *The Enola Holmes Mysteries*, American writer Nancy Springer creates a female detective, Sherlock Holmes’s sister Enola, and places her in the same Victorian setting the original stories were set in. Enola, even though she is not a reinterpretation of Sherlock’s character himself, shares several attributes with him – underlining the idea of her being his sister, a distinctive person but somehow “related” (i.e. similar) to him – while employing her own methods of detection. In these adventures, Enola Holmes is a 14-year-old girl living with her mother Eudoria Holmes, another original character by Springer, and separate from her brothers. With the disappearance of her mother on the day of her fourteenth birthday, Enola becomes a perditorian (a detective who finds missing persons), initially to find her mother. However, even beyond her first case, Enola’s attention is drawn to cases involving missing or distressed individuals, which ultimately compels her to pursue finding missing persons as a professional endeavour. While she evades her brothers, who insist on sending her to a boarding school to turn her into a ‘proper lady’, Enola pursues her career as a scientific perditorian.

This chapter will first explore the common traits shared by Sherlock and Enola Holmes by briefly recalling the original Sherlock Holmes’s characteristics and investigative methods and comparing them with Enola’s. Second, it analyses how Enola’s distinctive traits are employed. My focus will be limited to their respective traits and investigative techniques to showcase the differences that set Enola apart in terms of how she solves cases through a comparative analysis of these two fictional detectives.

Shared Traits

Sherlock Holmes has iconic traits that are often carried over into adaptations and rewrites of Doyle’s universe. Even when the protagonist is a different character than Sherlock, the new character often contains (modified) variants of some of these iconic traits. This chapter will provide an analysis of how the character Enola in *The Enola Holmes Mysteries* retains certain core characteristics associated with Holmes,

which are intelligence, scientific knowledge, disguise, and solving ciphers, but also reshapes these traits to align with her own character.

Intelligence

In some adaptations or interpretations, Sherlock has an additional sister or a brother (such as the BBC series *Sherlock*, which features a sister named Eurus Holmes, and the movie *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother*) to make possible the competition for mind games and to provide Sherlock with an equal opponent. In line with that tendency, Nancy Springer invents a fictional sister for Sherlock and makes her an intelligent detective.

Sherlock Holmes is renowned for his exceptional intellect, which is one of his defining characteristics. There are many examples where Sherlock's wit is on display in the original, but perhaps one of the most striking and most impressive is found in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band". In this story, a young woman named Helen Stoner seeks Holmes's help in investigating the strange death of her sister, Julia. Holmes claims that he solved the case when he entered the room of their stepfather, Dr Raymott. Utilising his observational skills and intelligence, Sherlock reveals that Julia was bitten by a snake, which was released through a ventilator by her stepfather (Doyle 273).

Sherlock is the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has ever seen, Watson further comments in "A Scandal in Bohemia" (155). Sherlock's reasoning method, a testament to his remarkable intelligence, starts with observations and the essential facts related to each case. From these foundational details, he proceeds to make connections and construct theories. Another instance that shows his intelligence and rapid comprehension is when Watson visits him after getting married. Sherlock notices the exact amount of weight that Watson has gained since his marriage and that he has started to practice medicine again (see Scaggs 39-40). He is inclined to draw conclusions from seemingly insignificant observations, which proves his intelligence. Christopher Redmond emphasises his ability to discern even the smallest details, ultimately leading him to arrive at the solution for each case. He quotes Sherlock explaining where to focus one's attention during observations, which is the first step of his method:

I can never bring you to realize the importance of sleeves, the suggestiveness of thumb-nails, or the great issues that may hang from a bootlace. . . . Never trust to general impressions, my boy, but concentrate yourself upon details. My first glance is always at a woman's sleeve. In a man it is perhaps better first to take the knee of the trouser. (Doyle 196)

Enola's intelligence and her role as a detective become evident as she embarks on various adventures and successfully solves cases. The first case Enola undertakes is *The Case of The Missing Marquess*. Upon receiving news about Lord Tewksbury's disappearance, Enola delves deeper into the matter. Seated in a tea shop, she scrutinises

the news about the missing Lord Tewksbury, particularly focusing on the photograph of him dressed in Fauntleroy fashion. Expressing a hope that “he wasn’t made to wear velvet and frills every day” (111), Enola thinks his mother had been influenced by the *Little Lord Fauntleroy* book and dressed him accordingly. As she continues reading the news, Enola exclaims upon discovering that Tewksbury is twelve years old, as his clothing had led her to believe he was younger. She comments on how the boy should be attired in a manner suitable for his age “a woolen jacket and knickers, an Eton collar with a tie, and a decent, manly haircut” (113). Subsequently, Enola decides to visit Basilwhether Park, claiming that she “just knew where Lord Tewksbury might be” (114).

Empathising with Tewksbury, Enola considers that he may need his own place to be alone. In the woodlands of Basilwhether Park, she searches for a distinctive tree. She discovers a location constructed atop the convergence of four trees that have grown from a single base and gets all the clues from the hideaway. On her way back, she crosses paths with Inspector Lestrade and elaborates on her theory that Tewksbury has not been kidnapped but has instead chosen to run away, possibly with the intention of leaving the country by ship (114-130).

In the final novel, Enola proves herself to be a smart and capable detective to other characters. She faces a challenge when she receives a skytale from her mother, not knowing how to decipher it since she needs the correct cylindrical object. When she needs to ride a bicycle to reach the train station, she starts to think about the connection between her bicycle and her mom. “Mum had taken quite a bit of trouble to teach me to ride a bicycle, now that I thought about it, and that was extraordinary, for Mum had not generally troubled herself much about me” (*Gypsy Goodbye* 143). Recalling the lessons and recognising Eudoria’s passion for cycling, Enola sees the bicycle as a symbol of her mother’s beliefs:

Evidently the ability to ride a bicycle had been important to Mum, Suffragist and reformer that she was. Indeed, standing on a cold floor barefoot in my nightgown and recalling various conversations, I realised that a bicycle was a symbol of sorts for Mum’s beliefs: A bicycle offered freedom of movement to females whilst defiantly flaunting the fact that they were, indeed, bipeds, just like those who wore trousers. (143-144)

Drawing these connections, Enola, noting the bicycle’s various cylindrical components, deduces that the letter, to be deciphered, requires the presence of a bicycle. Moreover, as Enola pursues her “calling” of locating missing individuals (*Missing Marquess* 121), she also demonstrates her cleverness in evading her brothers when they cross paths. For instance, when she unexpectedly runs into Mycroft, she must think and act swiftly to evade him:

Simultaneously I shrieked “That man laid hands upon me!” An accusation so shocking that bystanders gasped with outrage and turned upon Mycroft with shouts and stares. Meanwhile, dodging between skirts and ducking beneath gentlemanly elbows, I took refuge once

more in the Ladies' Lavatory, whisking past the doorkeeper with a gabbled tale of having forgotten something. (*Pink Fan* 19-20)

In the face of the unexpected confrontation with Mycroft, her quick thinking ensures his inability to capture Enola, allowing her to persist in her duties. Enola's ability to promptly devise and execute an escape route underscores her intelligence.

It seems clear that Enola demonstrates her intelligence by investigating and following clues when looking for missing individuals. Similar to Sherlock, who is the epitome of intelligence and defeats villains with his superior intelligence (Asomiv qtd. in Redmond), Enola is no less formidable, skilfully unravelling mysteries and showcasing her sharp mind.

Scientific Knowledge

Sherlock is a representation of a scientific mind and for him science is the ultimate way of unravelling mysteries. Christopher Clausen points out that "he is conceived – and conceives of himself as a man who applies scientific methods to the detection of crime and that his success as a detective is due to those methods" (109). In *A Study in Scarlet*, Watson lists and evaluates his scientific knowledge to demonstrate his limits according to the fields. He writes:

1. Knowledge of Literature. — Nil.
2. Knowledge of Philosophy. — Nil.
3. Knowledge of Astronomy. — Nil.
4. Knowledge of Politics. — Feeble.
5. Knowledge of Botany. — Variable.

Well up in belladonna, opium and poisons generally. Knows nothing of practical gardening.

6. Knowledge of Geology. — Practical but Limited.

Tells at a glance different soils from each other. After walks has shown me splashes upon trousers and told me by their colour and consistence in what part of London he had received them.

7. Knowledge of Chemistry. — Profound.
8. Knowledge of Anatomy. — Accurate, but unsystematic.
9. Knowledge of Sensational Literature. — Immense. (31-32)

In addition to these scientific pursuits, it is noteworthy that Sherlock is an expert in forensic science employing several techniques, including the analysis of fingerprints, footprints, and handwritten or typewritten text (O'Brien). Furthermore, he mentions authoring several monographs, one of them being *Upon the Distinction between the Ashes of the Various Tobaccos* in *The Sign of Four* (91).

In "The Adventure of the Boscombe Valley Mystery", a man's murder results in the police wrongly accusing his son. Sherlock thoroughly examines the crime scene, combining various clues to construct a profile of the murderer. Discerning from the

footprints, Sherlock concludes that another individual, the actual murderer, was present at the crime scene. The footprints indicate this person wears thick-soled shooting boots and limps with the right leg (213). Another significant clue Sherlock uncovers pertains to ashes at the crime scene. These ashes reveal important details about the murderer: "He had stood behind that tree during the interview between the father and son. He had even smoked there. I found the ash of a cigar, which my special knowledge of tobacco ashes enables me to pronounce as an Indian cigar" (214). The footprints and ashes provide crucial clues for identifying the real murderer, firmly establishing that the culprit is someone other than initially suspected.

Chemistry holds a significant role in Sherlock's life. Watson frequently informs the reader of Sherlock's engagement in experiments and his dedicated pursuit of chemical investigations. In "The Naval Treaty", Sherlock mentions one of the chemical investigations he is working on to solve what he calls a "commonplace little murder" (448). He explains, "If this paper remains blue, all is well. If it turns red, it means a man's life. He dipped it into the test tube and it flushed at once into a dull, dirty crimson" (448). Sherlock's ingenious use of a chemical experiment, then, shows his scientific acumen and also serves as the decisive element leading to the resolution of a case.

Enola also possesses a scientific mind. The scope of her scientific knowledge becomes apparent in the first case she takes on. Enola encounters an astral perditorian named Madame Laelia Sibyl de Papaver, who claims to find missing people by communicating with spirits. Enola becomes irritated by Madame Laelia calling herself a perditorian "with all her blather of spirits" (*Missing Marquess* 120): "I was a perditorian. Or I would be. Not astral. Professional. The world's first professional, logical, scientific perditorian" (120). It is evident that Enola is committed to approaching her work in a scientific and methodical manner, and she lacks respect for those who do not share this approach.

Unlike Sherlock, Enola Holmes only has knowledge of botany as her scientific expertise and utilises it during her investigations. While Sherlock's utilisation of botany may be limited, it is still a method Enola inherits from her literary template and thus worth mentioning. Enola's botanical knowledge stems from her mother, Eudoria Holmes, who has a deep affinity for flowers and even engages in botanical illustrations. In addition, Enola mentions that flowers and botany are considered to be a female hobby, and half the genteel ladies in England might thus be considered botanists (*Bizarre Bouquets* 48).

In *The Case of The Bizarre Bouquets*, she finds out that Dr Watson has been kidnapped and pays a visit to his wife, Mary Watson. A peculiar bouquet catches her attention among the flowers sent by those who are concerned for Watson's wellbeing. When Enola recognises the strange flower arrangement, she starts to think about the conditions in which these plants grow: "The poppies must have been

forced in a hothouse – all flowers except snowdrops came from hothouses at this time of year; nothing remarkable in that. But that the asparagus should have been so cultivated – most peculiar” (46). Drawing upon her botanical knowledge, Enola deduces that the sender of the bouquet must possess a keen understanding and must have cultivated those specific plants in an enclosed location: “Who on earth would trouble with such a useless prickly-bush as hawthorn in a hothouse, when like a weed it grew everywhere in the countryside?” (46). The bouquet must have come from “[s]omeone eccentric, petty and spiteful in quite a creative way, someone enjoying an interesting ‘garden’ variety of gleeful madness. And someone so dedicated to the pursuit of botanical malice that he—or she—grew hawthorn in a hothouse” (57). Later, Enola resolves to keep an eye on the house of the Watsons, anticipating the possibility of another delivery. She manages to catch another bouquet and speaks to the boy who delivered it, acquiring a crucial clue that sheds light on the identity of the perpetrator.

Enola sees herself as a rationalist (*Pink Fan* 146) and prioritises logic. She remarks that she has read her father’s logic books, Malthus and Darwin, and holds rational and scientific views like her parents (*Missing Marquess* 19). Although Enola may not have expertise in chemistry or other sciences (except botany) as Sherlock has, she is enthusiastic about learning about sciences such as chemistry, higher mathematics, and modern literature. She has strong aspirations of attending university to further her knowledge which is a testament to her scientific disposition (*Gypsy Goodbye* 107).

In short, both Enola and Sherlock exhibit a profound reliance on scientific methods in their approaches to solving mysteries. Sherlock’s primary scientific pursuits revolve prominently around the field of chemistry. Enola’s scientific interest, on the other hand, lies predominantly in botany. Despite the divergence in their specific scientific focuses, both characters share a commonality in having scientific minds. This shared trait becomes evident as they integrate their scientific knowledge into the process of solving cases.

Disguise

Sherlock Holmes is portrayed as a master of disguise, which is an indispensable tool in his detective work. Through adopting various personas, Sherlock blends into environments without drawing attention. Disguising himself enables Sherlock Holmes to infiltrate diverse social circles, gaining trust and collecting information from suspects and witnesses.

Sherlock Holmes uses various personas, including that of a drunken-looking groom, an Italian priest, an elderly man, an elderly woman, and the plumber Escott among other notable examples. His mastery of disguise is so exceptional that on numerous

occasions Watson struggles to recognise him at first glance. In “A Scandal in Bohemia”, Watson describes an encounter where Holmes enters the room disguised:

It was close upon four before the door opened, and a drunken-looking groom, ill-kempt and side-whiskered, with an inflamed face and disreputable clothes, walked into the room. Accustomed as I was to my friend’s amazing powers in the use of disguises, I had to look three times before I was certain that it was indeed he. (Doyle 167)

Enola’s ongoing escape from the Holmes brothers necessitates her to perpetually conceal her true identity. Initially, Enola transforms her appearance into that of a widow by pilfering a dress from her mother’s wardrobe. Clad in black attire, she not only ages her look by a decade but also renders herself unidentifiable. This allows her to reach London without getting noticed and to initiate her mission to find her mother (*Missing Marquess* 104-105).

Another reason for her to be in disguise is that Enola, as a young girl devoid of any professional titles, finds herself compelled to maintain a constant state of disguise while detecting. Hence, in *The Case of the Left-Handed Lady*, Enola creates a persona named Ivy Meshle to navigate her daily life. In this guise, she assumes the role of the made-up perditorian Dr Ragostin’s secretary. Within the same novel, she further conceals her identity by posing as Dr Ragostin’s wife, a necessary adjustment to appear as more refined. Thanks to her clever disguise, Enola is able to be taken seriously and to conduct her interrogation with the mother of the missing Lady Cecily.

In *The Case of the Bizarre Bouquets*, she chooses to disguise herself as an attractive woman named Miss Viola Everseau to approach Mary Watson under the guise of being a former patient of the doctor, gathering information about the missing Dr Watson. She must alter her appearance and earn the trust of individuals connected to the investigation. Potentially because of that, the series is suffused with descriptions of attires, of makeup, and of hair. Additionally, her disguises involve an awareness of fashion and trends that she needs to consider to meet society’s expectations:

The hair was a problem. In order to pass as a woman, you see, I had to wear it up. Girls wore their frocks short and their hair long, but women had to wear their dresses long and their hair ‘up.’ While almost every other inch of a gentlewoman must be covered during the daytime, her ears, it seemed, must be always bared. (*Left-Handed Lady* 36)

Enola recognises the importance of disguise to establish and maintain her assumed identity and to blend in or stand out as needed to solve the mysteries she encounters. In *The Case of the Peculiar Pink Fan*, Enola must blend into an environment without attracting too much attention, so she disguises herself as a female scholar: “I was got up as a female scholar, with my unlovely hair in a plain bun and my narrow, sallow face disguised by ebony-rimmed spectacles. These, while minimising my alarming nose, also made me an object rather beneath notice, as no fashionable lady would ever wear glasses” (*Pink Fan* 8).

While Sherlock Holmes has shorter periods of disguises and is able to rid himself of his disguises during an investigation, Enola has to remain disguised due to her being on the run in order to live freely and because she is too young to be a trustworthy detective. Nonetheless, both Sherlock and Enola have remarkable abilities in disguise and acting, which play a pivotal role in their detective work.

Solving Ciphers

Sherlock's expertise in deciphering codes allows him to solve complex cases and uncover hidden meanings within mysterious texts. Sherlock remarks on his familiarity with all forms of secret writings, having written a monograph analysing one hundred and sixty ciphers (Doyle 523).

In "The Adventure of the Dancing Men", Holmes is faced with a perplexing case where a cipher is the key to solving the mystery. The enigma unfolds when Mr Cubitt becomes aware of his wife's unease, brought on by a series of encrypted letters from America, containing hieroglyphs of dancing figures. Sherlock cracks the cipher of the dancing men by analysing the frequency of "x"-shaped figures and considering the fact that the most commonly used letter in English is "e". After deciphering the cryptic code, Holmes sends a message to the person who is behind the coded messages, the murderer, requesting a meeting. The coded summons reaches the culprit, who believes that the woman he loves has issued the call. The murderer is caught thanks to Sherlock's decoding of the dancing men and writing a coded message in response.

Enola's interest in ciphers is evident from the beginning of the series. Her passion for codes mirrors her mother's, and it is further nurtured by a small cipher booklet that her mother thoughtfully compiled and left for her prior to her departure from home. Enola expresses this interest as follows: "I enjoyed the ciphers after all, for I loved finding things, and Mum's ciphers gave me a new way to do this, first discovering the hidden meaning, then the treasure" (*Missing Marquess* 88). Enola finds this treasure as she deciphers messages in her mother's cipher booklet. After deciphering one of the messages and finding a "Bank of England note for a hundred pounds" (81), she realises that her mother has hidden riches for her.

Another cipher that leads to money is written on a page of the booklet decorated with ivy trailing along a picket fence. At first, she struggles to decipher the two-lined code. However, she looks at the cipher again and picks out her name in the first three letters of the top line combined with the first two letters of the bottom line. Realising her mother's intentional depiction of the ivy zigzagging up and down the picket fence, she follows the same pattern to rewrite the cipher. Additionally, she observes that the ivy in the painting grew from right to left, prompting her to read the words in the same direction (89). With the financial resources she discovered,