CHAPTER 4

(RE)PRESENTING SHERLOCK HOLMES

The veritist chooses for his subject not the impossible, not even the possible, but always the probable.

Hamlin Garland, *Forum*

If every discourse enters into a relation of verisimilitude with its own laws, the murder mystery takes verisimilitude for its very theme; verisimilitude is not only its law but also its object. An inverted object, so to speak—for the law of the murder mystery consists in establishing an antiverisimilitude.

Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*

With Holmes and Watson, however, Conan Doyle achieved something closer to the ageless if not the transcendent. The two men can be ranked fictionally with Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, or Jeeves and Wooster, and (since many people subconsciously refer to them as if they were, in fact, real) with Samuel Johnson and James Boswell.

Christopher Hitchens, "The Case of Arthur Conan Doyle"

Now, the process has become complete: Watson's stories, those feeble evocations of the compelling personality we both knew, have taken on a life of their own, and the living creature of Sherlock Holmes has become ethereal, dreamy. Fictional.

Laurie R. King, *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*

Though the figure of Sherlock Holmes has been revisited by many crime writers, not until Carole Nelson Douglas's *Good Night, Mr Holmes* in 1990 was there a feminist re-vision of the canonical detective. Douglas's series features Irene Adler, known to Holmes as *the* woman because she outwitted him in "A Scandal in Bohemia." At the end of Doyle's story, Adler and her attorney, Godfrey Norton, elude Holmes by eloping to the continent. Douglas adds Penelope Huxleigh, impecunious parson's daughter, to serve as Irene's amanuensis and social/intellectual foil; in

short, as Irene's Watson. The three central figures enjoy high-spirited adventures across Europe, and both Holmes and Watson make periodic appearances.

Laurie R. King's approach is even more radical, as it requires Doyle's characters—Sherlock Holmes, John Watson, Mycroft Holmes—to remain prominent in the series, but the central figure is King's triumphant creation, Mary Russell. Russell is "an independent and outspoken heroine" who "blooms with intelligence and vivacity" (Stasio, "Crime" 41). Marilyn Stasio calls *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* "enchanting"; Carolyn Heilbrun characterizes the Holmes/Russell series as "brilliant" (*Threshold* 94). King's series succeeds on its own—that is, readers do not need to know, or like, the Conan Doyle stories, to enjoy King's series—but it also provides a intelligent and enjoyable rewriting of the paradigmatic investigator and his loyal sidekick. Because Holmes and Watson have become such pop culture icons, King can assume that all readers have some preexisting ideas about them, even those who have never read a Conan Doyle story. Her audience will also include many readers with some knowledge of the original stories and those who have extensive, detailed knowledge of them.[1] Her awareness of these audiences is evident in Mary Russell's "Author's Note" to the first book, when King writes (as Mary):

> To the reader who comes upon my story with no previous knowledge of the habits and personality of [Sherlock Holmes], there may be some references that pass by unseen. At the other end of the spectrum are the readers who have committed whole sections of the Conan Doyle corpus (a particularly appropriate word here) to memory. These readers may find places at which my account differs from the words of Holmes' previous biographer, Dr. Watson, and will very probably take offence at my presentation of the man as being someone totally different from the "real" Holmes of Watson's writings. (xx)

King shows herself to be aware of these multiple audiences, and in the two narrative frames that precede the text of *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*, she openly lays claim to a whole cluster of "reality" issues. Revisiting such a well-known body of work poses challenges to both King and Douglas, but these authors also seize the opportunity to provide feminist analysis of the Holmes mythology and to construct an alternative model. In Elaine Showalter's terms, their work has affiliations both to feminist critique and to gynocritics. Their position is unique because they are, in a very real sense, engaging in literary analysis. The past that they revisit is not only a specific social and historical milieu, like the other writers in this study, but it is also a literary oeuvre, stories well known and frequently studied.

Readers find in these two series, then, the result of an analytical exercise—King's and Douglas's critique of the Holmes corpus—and the creation of a new model, one that takes into account the existing texts but reconceives and reshapes them in a feminist form. Their female investigators are excellent examples of what Lanser calls "narrative voices that seek to write themselves into Literature without leaving Literature the same" (8). Unlike the vast majority of Holmes-inspired stories, King's and Douglas's have the power to alter readers' perceptions of the originals. Although none of the authors Lanser examines in *Fictions of Authority* address existing male texts as directly as do King and Douglas, her comments seem perfectly matched to their project:

> Such narrators often call into question the very authority they endorse or, conversely, endorse the authority they seem to be questioning. That is, as they strive to create fictions of *authority*, these narrators expose *fictions* of authority as the Western novel has constructed it—and in exposing the fictions, they may end up re-establishing the authority. Some of these texts work out such dilemmas on their thematic surfaces, constructing fictions *of*—that is, *about*—authority, as well. (8, emphasis in the original)

In this chapter, I consider the feminist critique of King and Douglas before turning to the new models they are creating for readers, considering their successes and limitations in remaking the Holmes stories for contemporary readers. Throughout the chapter, I incorporate the issues they draw into their orbits and discuss their narrative strategies for achieving all of these things. How do King and Douglas interrogate notions of reality? How do they reveal the inherent sexism of texts like the Holmes stories? How do they suggest, through their narratives, alternatives modes of being and relating? These are the questions addressed in this chapter.

The Real and the Fictional

Analysis of King's and Douglas's interrogation of reality, and the feminist orientation of that interrogation, should be prefaced by a brief consideration of verisimilitude in crime fiction. Tzvetan Todorov's *The Poetics of Prose* pays considerable attention to crime fiction. Some of his essays deal explicitly with the genre, while others, such as "An Introduction to Verisimilitude," use the genre to illustrate key concepts. Jonathan Culler's foreword explains that Todorov's conception of genre restores it "to a central place in literary theory. Generic conventions account for the meaning that is produced when a work violates or evades these conventions, and generic codes are postulated in order to explain the way we treat details in different

sorts of works" (11).[2] Helen Carr makes a similar observation in reference to a point made in discussion by Rosalind Coward: "if a clock strikes nine in a crime novel, we read that possible clue in the appropriate way. It will be different from our response to the stroke of a clock in a gothic novel . . . or in a modernist text, as for example in *Mrs Dalloway*" (7).

Because King and Douglas have taken up a universally known figure, these considerations are especially pertinent, as each reference to Conan Doyle, Watson, or Holmes's "reality" resonates with readers' knowledge. Some of these references are light hearted, but others take seriously the issue of "reality" for readers. The cumulative effect challenges complacency, specifically complacency about women's social roles and their potential to be active agents. I would like to consider Todorov's argument about the role of "antiverisimilitude" in crime fiction, partially cited at the beginning of this chapter. Todorov explains that because "the obvious suspects turn out to be innocent, and the innocent are 'suspect,' the solution to the mystery must obey these two imperatives: possibility and the absence of verisimilitude" (85). Todorov seems to read verisimilitude as a sort of probability, which is indeed part of its definition.[3] Rather than saying that crime fiction chooses anti-verisimilitude as its structural basis, however, I would argue that it exposes the many verisimilitudes that can exist simultaneously. Those who live under social structures that do not grant them full citizenship, in fact, do inhabit a different reality than those who are fully enfranchised. Reality for women, as shown by all of the writers examined in this study, is different, but equally "real" and existing simultaneously with the dominant "reality."

The solution to the crime *does* possess verisimilitude; at least it does in any contemporary mystery worth reading. The classical whodunit sometimes obeys Todorov's law about the least likely suspect, but as the genre has developed (particularly in the area of character development) it does this less and less frequently. As crime writer Barbara Paul notes, "older mystery novels went in big for surprise endings, putting the burden of counteracting predictability exclusively on the conclusion. Revealing the murderer to be the Least Likely Suspect was a favourite device—a stratagem no mystery writer today would dare try for fear of being laughed out of the profession" (122). Todorov's claim that it is "not difficult to discover the killer in a murder mystery: we need merely follow *the verisimilitude of the text* and not the truth of the world evoked" (86; emphasis in the original) seems much less applicable now than it might have been in 1966, and certainly has no place in consideration of the historical crime novels that comprise this study. And yet for the research-conscious writer, Todorov's observation that "verisimilitude is the theme of the murder mystery; its law is the antagonism between truth and verisimilitude" (86) can also be seen to apply to their *historical* project. The world they are creating in their novels must

have its own internal verisimilitude, but that must be based on the "truth" of historical research and presented in such a way that readers can have faith in the accuracy of what they are learning.

Marilyn Stasio's review of *A Monstrous Regiment of Women* identifies the milieu, the historical period, as influencing the verisimilitude of both King's Holmes and Russell: "In the end, though, it isn't romantic love as much as the novel's post–World War I period that diminishes the brilliant ratiocinator, who pales into transparency outside his own Victorian era. But if her 60-year-old mentor looks peaked, 21-year-old Mary, who narrates this story, blooms with intelligence and vivacity in the less rigid social climate of 1920s England." When asked about her reasons for choosing Holmes in a 1997 interview, King mentions the combination of Holmes's character and the changing times, corroborating the accuracy of Stasio's analysis. King asks "what other character in the history of crime fiction—of any fiction—could you find who would create the sparks with a young woman like that? What other turning point could you think of when the old and the new meet too dramatically, and the male and female face off?" ("Beekeepers" 150). She presents this idea in Mary Russell's words in the "Author's Note" to *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*, too, when Russell comments on how readers will find Holmes different from his depiction in the Conan Doyle stories. "Her" Holmes, Russell points out, is an older, retired Holmes, but even more importantly, "the world was a different place from that of Victoria Regina. Automobiles and electricity were replacing hansom cabs and gaslights, the telephone was nosing its obtrusive self into the lives even of village people, and the horrors of war in the trenches were beginning to eat at the very fabric of the nation" (xx).

Milieu, of course, is particularly important in historical fiction because it does more than establish the author's credibility and provide an authentic backdrop for the events of the narrative; in historical fiction, the milieu is part of the narrative's subject. Accurate, detailed presentation of the narrative's milieu conveys information to the reader about that time and place; this information is an important part of what the serious novelist wants to teach her reader, not mere window dressing. This is especially true for the historical crime novelists under consideration here: although the plot is crucial for the success of a crime novel, it must obey the demands of the chosen historical setting and it should not render that setting insignificant. In a traditional cozy mystery, for example, we may take the isolated country house as writ, and observe key details only insofar as they might bear on the plot. (Could this character have gotten from the billiard room to the hall in under two minutes? Or could that character have found a weapon conveniently to hand in the library?) Rosalind Coward's observation about the way readers note details, cited above, has an added resonance in these historical crime novels.

One of the key strategies used by both King and Douglas to probe questions of reality is a variety of framing devices. Both series are heavily framed, relying upon traditional devices such as "found manuscripts" and calling readers' attention to all kinds of verifying devices (both real and fictional). Each book in the Mary Russell series includes an "Editor's Preface," in which King writes in her own voice; these prefaces establish the found manuscript convention in intriguing detail.[4] King, in the "Editor's Preface" to the inaugural novel, describes the arrival of a trunk full of intriguing objects, including manuscripts. Readers know that the preface is part of an elaborate fiction, but nonetheless enjoy King's construction of verisimilitude. She presents herself in the first person, as Laurie R. King, and describes the arrival of the trunk via UPS in circumstantial detail. Her captivating presentation of the familiar invokes a traditional awakening of curiosity. Instead of vegetable seeds, a mysterious package arrives: what can be in it? who can have sent it? These kinds of question form the basis of a great many mysteries.

The preface goes on to itemize the tantalizing contents and to describe the manuscripts themselves in considerable detail:

> And, right at the bottom, a layer of what proved to be manuscripts, although only one was immediately recognizable as such, the others being either English-sized foolscap covered top to bottom with tiny, difficult writing or the same hand on an unwieldy pile of mismatched scrap paper. Each was bound with narrow purple ribbon and sealed with wax, stamped *R*. (xiii)

The elements of this description are familiar to readers of crime novels (and of eighteenth-century fiction, too). The details describing the manuscripts create verisimilitude and otherness, and the items listed give the experienced mystery reader reason to pay attention during the narrative, waiting for the appearance of some of these objects. In *A Letter of Mary*, King's preface notes that "the inlaid box described in the following pages does exist, although when it reached me, there was no manuscript inside. It did hold a pair of black-lensed glasses, a dainty handkerchief embroidered with the letter *M*, and a key" (xii–xiii). The glasses are Miss Ruskin's (12, 16); the handkerchief one of those Russell bought for her performance as Mary Small, secretary to Colonel Edwards (138); the key is to the safe deposit box where Russell deposited the papyrus (314). Not all references are this straightforward; the box that appears in *A Letter of Mary*, the third book, is first mentioned in the preface to *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* as "a small wooden box, ornate with carving and inlay depicting palm trees and jungle animals" (xiii). Other items mentioned—"one carved ivory chopstick"—have not (yet) appeared in the first seven series titles.

These prefaces do more than describe the circumstances of the found manuscripts and the accompanying objects. King also invokes contemporary investigative images and suggests the continued existence of Mary Russell, who functions as a rather mysterious collaborator to the project. The references to contemporary investigative techniques are often linked to evidence that Mary Russell is alive. In *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*, there is a description of King's efforts to "trace the shipper through UPS" that ends with the information that a young man paid cash to ship the trunk from New York (xiii). In *Monstrous Regiment*, she mentions receiving "an odd and much travelled postcard. . . . [Written] in handwriting similar to that of the manuscripts" (x). In *A Letter of Mary*, King describes tracking down the origins of a newspaper clipping she received in the mail after publication of *Monstrous Regiment*; this information leads to some fingerprint analysis that provides a match between prints on an object in the mysterious trunk and those left behind during the mysterious goings-on in London that are the subject of the clipping received. In *The Moor*, King writes that she has "received a handful of communications as ill assorted as the original contents of the trunk." *O Jerusalem* takes this line even further, claiming that the original manuscript seemed incomplete, a problem rectified when "twenty-three neatly typed pages arrived in my mailbox" (1).

Mary Russell's commentaries address issues relevant to the stories themselves and only in the first book does her "Author's Note" directly take up the reality of Holmes. (Her comments on this issue included in the narrative themselves are considered later in the chapter; here I am concerned only with King's use of framing devices.) This change in Russell's commentaries seems apt, as King's notes set up a continuing (if one-sided) correspondence between her and someone who is presumably Russell. After taking up the subject of who is real in her note to the first book, Russell can leave it behind in the others, which resolve loose ends from the plot. In the prologue to *O Jerusalem*, Russell explains the chronological relation of this narrative to the others in the series and offers some comments on the difficulties of representing Arabic speech forms in English.

When, in the first series book, King offers a preface from the contemporary authenticator and a note from the first-person "author," she establishes two different kinds of work to be done by the framing devices. King's voice, as "editor," establishes a kind of external verisimilitude. These frames serve to authenticate the manuscripts she is supposedly editing for our reading pleasure; they also, as mentioned earlier, drop clues for attentive readers to watch for within the narrative itself. Russell's voice, as "author," works within that larger frame to comment on and explain the meaning of the narrative. In the books that have both editor's and author's frames, these work together to underline the themes of the books. These are not

empty gestures, then, but pointers to what is important thematically within the narrative. For example, those comments on translating Arabic speech forms into English that precede *O Jerusalem* begin by noting the fact that "Arabic has more grammatical forms than English" but proceeds quickly to criticism of the usual approaches to English translations which are, she says, "stilted and thus inaccurate," filled with exclamations such as "By the beard of the Prophet!" (8).[5]

Douglas' s Adler/Huxleigh novels use a series of afterwords and editor's notes to address similar issues. In these frames, Douglas calls upon another distinguished tradition, that of the scholarly commentator. Douglas creates Fiona Witherspoon, Ph.D, and gives her membership in the fictional group A.I.A/F.I.A., (Advocates/Friends of Irene Adler).[6] In this voice, Douglas can take up issues of authenticity and certification as well as analyze the concept of reality. Douglas, in Witherspoon's voice, cheerfully mocks both ends of the "reality" spectrum:

> True Holmes fanatics occupy two equally ridiculous camps: one holds that the tales as written by a historical Dr. Watson comprise authentic Victoriana and therefore cannot be challenged as to full candor or veracity; the other, even more extreme camp avers that a Scottish medical man of Irish antecedents, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, authored these pieces as pure fiction. This is patently ludicrous. (*Good Night* 403)

By treating Douglas's own fictional text as real, the Witherspoon voice mimics historical procedures while dealing with two text sources, both known by the reader to be fictional. An additional level of fictiveness is constructed because while "the Huxleigh diaries" are Douglas's own, she also claims her Holmesian pastiche as "fragments of previously unknown writings attributed to John H. Watson, M.D." (404, 403).

In the first four books, Douglas uses Witherspoon to comment on issues of historical credibility, linking "the Huxleigh diaries" to the "previously unknown fragments" of Watson's (i.e., Douglas's own narrative) plus the published Doyle stories "as recorded by Dr. Watson" and what might be called real history. In these frames, Douglas makes suggestions about the process of authorization; how do readers decide what is real and what is fictional? In weaving together all these disparate strands—some known to be historical, others fictional—Douglas's Witherspoon argues for the reality of Holmes and Adler. In *Irene at Large*, for example, she explains directly, if humorously, why this is "true":

> I have insisted from the first that Sherlock Holmes was no fictional construct, but a historic personage. Additionally, I argued that the Huxleigh diaries . . . support my theory: Holmes was real; Irene Adler was real.

> Indeed, to my mind the only suspect personage in the Holmes canon is Watson. This may have been a convenient pseudonym for the actual biographer, who has successfully hidden behind the "authorship" of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle for a century. (ix–x)

Douglas is having fun, and she invites the reader to have fun along with her. Though both King and Douglas argue for the reality of Holmes, King does so seriously through the voice of Mary Russell, who is part of the story being told. Douglas plays with the ideas through the voice of a contemporary pseudo-scholarly commentator.[7] Witherspoon's insistence on the documentary status of her sources and the way she uses one source to corroborate another are good historical practice, yet her goals—and the conclusions she reaches—are pure fiction. The existence and contents of the (fictional) Huxleigh diaries corroborates the existence of the (fictional) Holmes; the joke goes even further when she pretends that Watson may not be real although Holmes and Adler are. In *The Game*, King can jest about fictional creations of other authors when Russell and Holmes set off to find Kim O'Hara; she is startled to learn that Kim is "real," not just a character in Rudyard Kipling's novel. During the events of *The Game*, readers will meet not just a middle-aged Kim, but his son. Russell accepts his reality, but the reader can enjoy the form of its initial affirmation: Kim is " 'as real as I am,' said Sherlock Holmes" (8). The word "biographer" is relied on by both King and Douglas to create the *impression* of verisimilitude even though readers know these are fictional characters. If Holmes is real, the person who writes about him must be called a biographer; for Mary Russell, this is John Watson; for Fiona Witherspoon, it is some unidentified figure hiding behind both Watson and Conan Doyle!

In fact, the fictional characters can be made to justify, correct, or comment on the errors of the one real person in this confusion of authors, Arthur Conan Doyle. Douglas points out that while Doyle has created an "operatic impossibility, a contralto prima donna" in Adler, she had "fun justifying Doyle's error by finding operatic roles Irene could conceivably sing" (*Castle Rouge* 532). Classic problems of Holmes studies, like Watson's shifting wound and his marriage(s), can be rationalized; in *Irene at Large*, for example, Douglas presents a narrative that accounts for the wounds and for Watson's behavior in identifying them. Doyle's bizarre interest in the supernatural embarrasses and infuriates King's Watson and Holmes in *A Monstrous Regiment of Women*, and Russell speculates about the conjunction of the fairy fictions and the "true" Holmes stories. Watson tells Russell, " 'I have already complained strongly to the editors, but they say I have no recourse, since he's only my agent' " (180–81). Russell has no idea what Watson is talking about, but King's readers do. When Russell sees the article, only

Watson's genuine agitation makes her think the article is not a spoof of some kind. She regrets the appearance of the fairy article in the *Strand* because of its association with the "true" Holmes stories: publishing it "not only under the Doyle name, but in the very magazine that the Holmes stories appeared in, was thoughtless, to say the least" (206). Later, teasing Holmes about the fairies, she says Doyle has done him a service by driving away potential clients with silly problems because " 'now the British Public will assume that Sherlock Holmes is as much a fairy tale as those photographs' " (291). Conan Doyle's spirit photos are not, of course, accepted as genuine, but no one doubts that his belief in them was; there is a playful irony in worrying about the nonfiction article destroying the credibility of the fictional tales.

From her first outing, Douglas's Witherspoon raises issues of suppression, of who is allowed to tell the stories and of what stories get told. This is the main feminist payoff of her querying the reality of Holmes. Because the Huxleigh diaries "prove" that Adler and Holmes were real, these new texts reveal that "*some* authentic Holmes material was *suppressed*" (*Good Night* 404, emphasis in the original). Victorian era discretion led to autobiographical material being destroyed, she notes, and provides the neutral example of the explorer Sir Richard Francis Burton (1821–90), whose widow burned his unpublished writings. This is her pivot for making the feminist case for strong women being written out of historical accounts:

> Similarly, witness the long loss to history of the Huxleigh account with its frank and surprising depiction of a liberated American woman in Victorian England. It differs significantly from the then-dominant male view, evident even in the Holmes stories, in which women swooned with "brain fever" at the first sign of crisis. As Watson observes in a rediscovered Holmes text, "Irene Adler did not swoon." Exactly! And exactly why her unexpurgated adventures were suppressed—certainly through the modesty of her chronicler and later by other "judges" of their suitability for publication. (*Good Night* 404)

The modesty of the diarist, evident throughout her text, is corroborated by the provenance of the diaries, which were found in an abandoned safe deposit box in Shropshire, the home region of their author, the parson's daughter, Penelope Huxleigh. Later in the series, as the emphasis of these frames shifts to Ripperology, Witherspoon becomes identified as the "editor" whose job is "to collate various and obscure nineteenth-century historical documents into a coherent whole" (*Castle Rouge* 19). The advantages of Witherspoon's commentary for Douglas's fictional project lead naturally to this increasing importance and visibility as part of the text.

The two most recent Adler/Huxleigh novels come with an entirely different category of paratexts: the now-popular Reader's Guide for book

study groups, which includes background on the series and its author, discussion questions, a bibliography, and author interview. Also, *Chapel Noir* includes the first author acknowledgments, pointing toward experts and research resources. While the bibliographies are comprised primarily of biographies and general period histories, in the interview Douglas speaks openly of her feminist agenda. Douglas explains that her Adler and Huxleigh, like Doyle's Holmes and Watson before them, represent two sides of one whole; their "split personality . . . embodies the evolving roles of women in the late nineteenth century. . . . Together they provide a seriocomic point-counterpoint on women's restricted roles then and now" (*Castle Rouge* 533). Adler is "a wonderful vehicle for subtle but sharp feminist comment" (533). Douglas even situates her own feminist project in a larger landscape of such projects: "This is something women writers have been doing the past two decades: revisiting classic literary terrains and bringing the sketchy women characters into full-bodied prominence" (533).

Douglas's remarks raise the issue of *how* women writers approach the extension of those classic literary figures into a convincing feminist existence. King and Douglas construct their extensions of the Holmes myth very differently. King's elegant solution is to create Mary Russell, the young woman to be Holmes's equal partner, and set their partnership in motion after the end of Conan Doyle's stories. Her choice of 1915 as the start of their relationship was a deliberate one; the date was chosen "in order to have him free of the whole canon" ("Beekeepers" 150). Holmes, King points out, is "a perfect example of a character bigger than his creator, and I have found it both a challenge and a pleasure to free him from Conan Doyle's preconceptions" ("Beekeepers" 150). One of her foundational methods is that decision about time-setting: "after 1914, Holmes is mine" ("Beekeepers" 150).

Douglas, on the other hand, has Holmes still professionally active, and constructs versions of his activities that fit cleverly into the gaps permitted by the Conan Doyle stories. Douglas takes up passing references from the original stories and constructs new adventures for Holmes, weaving a role for Irene Adler and Nell Huxleigh. In *Good Morning, Irene*, the main plot revolves around a long-standing criminal conspiracy, one that includes elements and characters both real—the drowned man pulled from Thames by Bram Stoker, Alice Heine, Sarah Bernhard—and fictional—notably, the Montpensier case alluded to by Watson at the end of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.[8] Not only does Douglas write the Montpensier case for Holmes (late in the novel she has him preparing to "send some cablegrams" finalizing the case), but she does so in a way that allows Irene Adler to have not just an active role, but a more productive investigation than Holmes himself. The narrative shifts between Nell's record of her and Irene's activities and the record of Holmes's activities. Holmes himself can be found "usurping

one of [Watson's] rare privileges, that of recording" (174) his investigations. The alternating points of view consistently reveal Irene's greater involvement in the case, and her superior knowledge and feeling for the people and events both she and Holmes are working on. At the conclusion of the case, Holmes is even excluded from the meeting for the traditional unmasking and explanation.

Douglas's great strength, in fact, is in building on details of the original stories in politically powerfully ways. She can take a minor element in a major Holmes story, such as Laura's typewriting career in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and a less well-known tale that revolves around typing—"A Case of Identity"—and construct from such unlikely materials a statement of women's independence and importance. In *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Watson hears of "this Mrs Laura Lyons, of equivocal reputation," and learns from Dr. Mortimer that some local men "did something to enable her to earn an honest living. Stapleton did for one, and Sir Charles for another. I gave a trifle myself. It was to set her up in a typewriting business" (107). When he calls upon her, Watson finds her "sitting before a Remington typewriter" (110). While presumably she is in fact earning a living through typing, more important to the story is the fact that she also cherishes hopes of marrying Stapleton. Stapleton tricks her into sending the letter that lures Sir Charles to his death.

In "A Case of Identity," we meet another typewriting female who is deluded in her love life. Curiously, this story begins with Holmes and Watson discussing the difference between fiction and reality, with Holmes arguing that reality is much stranger than fiction dares to be, declaring that " 'there is nothing so unnatural as the commonplace' " (252). This is the backdrop for the entrance of Miss Mary Sutherland, a large, short-sighted, flamboyantly dressed typist. She has an independent income, but she is pleased to add to it through her typewriting. She reports that she gets " 'twopence a sheet, and I can often do from fifteen to twenty sheets in a day' " (255). "A Case of Identity," however, finally implies that typewriters are more interesting than the women who use them, and Holmes's interest is reserved for the arcana of typewriters and the deficient moral character of the stepfather. He is content to leave Mary Sutherland, his client, uninformed of the essential fact that it is her stepfather, with whom she and her mother are still living, who has tricked her. While Watson queries " 'and Miss Sutherland?,' " the story ends with Holmes's casual justification of this failure of his obligation to her:

> "If I tell her she will not believe me. You may remember the old Persian saying, 'There is danger for him who taketh the tiger cub, and danger also for whoso snatches a delusion from a woman.' There is as much sense in Hafiz as in Horace, and as much knowledge of the world" (267).

Nell Huxleigh is a typist, too, but Douglas presents the women's history view of typing as a new career opportunity for women. Nell is no deluded victim, and she manages her typewriting career professionally. She pays tuition to learn at a "typing academy," and she does not let readers minimize the difficulty of the task: "I did not relish doing daily battle with the black beast whose stiff keys required me to acquire the dexterity of a pianist while converting spidery copperplate texts into neat, printed letters. However, as my skills improved I came to take satisfaction in making the contrary machine perform to my demands" (*Good Night* 74). Douglas economically captures both the difficulty of the task, especially the era-specific heavy manual typewriter and copperplate originals, and the satisfaction of mastering it. Nell has textbooks to study, and once she starts working for clients she must learn "the law's peculiar syntax," in which she is helped by her knowledge of Latin, learned long ago at her father's insistence (77, 126). Nell's presence in the all-male Temple precincts is perhaps an anachronism, but Douglas gives Godfrey Norton and Nell several opportunities to remark on the strangeness of her presence there in mitigation.

Some beliefs expressed in the original tales are taken up by both King and Douglas, and woven into their own texts in ways that highlight the gender assumptions upon which they rest. "A Scandal in Bohemia" is obviously a key text for any feminist rewritings of Holmes. Douglas, of course, has taken Irene Adler from that story, but that is not the limit of its role in these two series. The success of Holmes's ruse for retrieving the incriminating photo from Irene Adler depends upon a thoroughly misogynistic assumption. " 'When a woman thinks that her house is on fire,' " Holmes explains knowingly to Watson, " 'her instinct is at once to rush to the thing which she values most. It is a perfectly overpowering impulse, and I have more than once taken advantage of it. . . . A married woman grabs at her baby, an unmarried one reaches for her jewel-box' " ("A Scandal in Bohemia" 226). What brainless, impulsive creatures women are! And what a world of dated assumptions lie behind the specific "objects" married and unmarried women value. Douglas's Irene Adler is a married woman without a baby, and her depiction picks up on the tension between these beliefs of Holmes and the story's resolution, which depends upon Adler's word being " 'inviolate' " (229), like a man's.

In the tale's prologue, Watson famously opines that love was foreign to Holmes's nature: "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. . . . Grit in a sensitive instrument, or a crack in one of his own high-power lenses, would not be more disturbing than a strong emotion in a nature such as his" ("A Scandal in Bohemia" 209). Watson's metaphor is irresistible; both

Douglas and King revisit it in conversations involving Holmes. Douglas's Holmes makes fun of Watson's phrases, quoting from Conan Doyle's story: " 'Love in my life would be "grit in a sensitive instrument," ' he mocked good-naturedly" (*Good Night* 4). Watson, however, is allowed to answer back, challenging Holmes on his equating " 'the company of women with diminution of your intellectual powers' " and drawing Holmes into a denunciation of women that is clearly socially constructed. Holmes defends himself by explaining how useless women are:

> "Think! How would an ordinary female accompany me through the night streets unhailed and unhampered? How would she navigate the suburban outlands we have trod together, upholstered in thirty yards of train and a veiled bonnet? Could she pick up a revolver and leave upon a midnight moment's notice, as you often have? How would one reared to faint upon the slightest pretext remain conscious in the face of violent death?" (5).

This speech is a typical in its denunciation of women for the restrictions patriarchal society has placed upon them. If women wear clothing that hampers them, are taught they must recoil from anything unpleasant, and find the world a dangerous place ("unhailed and unhampered"), the blame lies not with them, but with the social norms that make these things true. Douglas, in raising the volume, has made this evident.

King's strategy is different, though she too puts words in Holmes's mouth to critique Watson's metaphor. While Douglas's Holmes admires Irene Adler, he remains the emotional isolationist Conan Doyle created. King, on the other hand, presents a Holmes who has grown in wisdom. In *A Letter of Mary*, Holmes speaks to Russell about his "totally irrational" fear for her safety at Colonel Edwards's house. What the older, wiser Holmes realizes is that sometimes "the heart sees something which the mind does not." In explaining this realization to his wife, he echoes Conan Doyle's words from "A Scandal in Bohemia": " 'Many years ago, in my foolish youth, I thought I should never marry. I was quite convinced that strong emotion interfered with rational thought, like grit in a sensitive instrument' " (31–32). He does not deny the belief Watson expresses in the original, but he presents himself as having learned better in the intervening years.

Social Critique

In addition to analyzing the structures of the Holmes and Watson model, King's and Douglas's series also look at the historical social structures of Victorian and Edwardian England. Both *Monstrous Regiment* and *A Letter of Mary* not only take a long, serious look at important topics like the civic

status of women, but also go beyond that to consider issues including the history of women's relation to organized religion from days when Christianity was new. These topics are not extraneous, but an integral part of the narratives, closely connected to both the crime plot itself and the verisimilitude of the milieu. On the first point, King has written that "using an abstract idea to underscore plot elements is a technique used in any type of novel, but it is of particular value in the mystery" ("God-Talk"). On the second point, she argues that if "detail is the life-blood of fiction, in crime fiction it is not only the blood but the pumping heart as well. If I write about nomadic Arabs in 1919 Palestine and describe the tents, the coffee ritual, and the kuffiyah, how can I fail to bring in the Qur'an? Or in 1923 London, give the reader the cloche hat, the silver tea-set, and the taxicabs, but omit the Book of Common Prayer?" ("God-Talk").

As the series develops, King's "topics" change somewhat. *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* charts Russell's growing maturity as a human being and as a Holmes-trained detective, with the place of women in higher education a minor topic. The second and third novels put women's issues squarely at the center of the action, not only the social/legal situation in the early 1920s but also their relation to religion from the very beginning; *Monstrous Regiment* teaches readers about first-century Beruria and *A Letter of Mary* looks at the role of Mary Magdalene in the early Christian church (long before Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code*). The fourth novel, *The Moor*, is the most direct take on Conan Doyle: Russell and Holmes are called to Dartmoor to investigate a mystery revolving around spectral coaches and hounds; the references to "The Hound of the Baskervilles" are plentiful and direct. King's interest in Sabine Baring-Gould creates another "topic" for the novel, one that is carefully researched and thoroughly presented. The review of *The Moor* in the newsletter of the Sabine Baring-Gould Appreciation Society notes approvingly "the use of Baring-Gould's own books as a way to introduce key elements of the plot, as well as for chapter headings" and King "has done her homework" (Graebe). The centrality of this topic is evidenced by the inclusion of both a map of Dartmoor and a portrait of Baring-Gould, but especially by King's postscript that provides contact information for the SBG Appreciation Society as well as suggestions for further reading. After taking on the famous "Hound of the Baskervilles" in *The Moor*, King shifts her focus a bit. *O Jerusalem* gives readers insight into the fraught history of that city, and of the conflicts between Jews and Arabs that are still a part of world news today. Her "Editor's Preface" to that work does relatively little with questions of authenticity, though it does mention the arrival of the missing manuscript pages and explains the break in chronological sequence. Instead, most of the preface provides a historical overview of the conflict in Palestine,

beginning with the situation in 1919 (the setting of the book) but ranging back in time to the Egyptians and forward to the present day. In *Justice Hall*, she turns to the issues that face England's titled families in the postwar period and, compellingly, the story of those "shot at dawn" during the war. Again, her afterword points toward the centrality of this "topic," bringing readers up to date on it and describing the "Shot at Dawn" memorial, unveiled in June 2001, in England. Women's issues are almost totally submerged, and Russell takes a surprisingly conservative attitude toward the landed gentry. When she and Iris Sutherland locate Gabriel Hughenfort's widow, the legal standing of the son they discover is of paramount importance because "an illegitimate child could not inherit, no more than a female child could" (278). Earlier in the novel, she wonders briefly whether Phillida minds being out of the inheritance cycle simply because she is female, but she—and the reader—have little sympathy for the shallow, brittle Phillida. When the five year old is introduced to the crowd as the seventh duke of Beauville, Russell seems to endorse this patriarchal system and its consequences as she rhapsodizes about young Gabe.

Monstrous Regiment provides the most comprehensive treatment of women's history from this period. Margery Childe, and her New Temple in God, are a brilliant means of putting women's issues on the table naturally. The temple is not simply a place of worship, but a social services agency with a clear political agenda. The varied schedule of services are only one element of the temple. Their undertaking, Childe explains to Russell, is to " 'touch everything concerned with the lives of women' " (50). The temple's key areas are " 'literacy, health, safety, and political reform,' " and the reader is made to see how these different areas intersect in their impact on women's lives. Safety, for example, is both a health project and a political one, since abused wives have no legal recourse against their husbands. As Russell infiltrates the temple's workings, she—and the reader—are offered anecdotal evidence of these interconnecting obstacles.

Childe's vision is transcendently feminist, because while she acknowledges that men do suffer social injustices, she argues that they have many sources of assistance available to them; women, in contrast, must help one another as women, crossing social and economic boundaries to see what they share. Partly for this reason, she speaks against the way the vote was given: not only is it insufficient, but it also shattered " 'the underlying unity of feminists' " (53). King can use the figure of Childe as a mouthpiece for strong statements about women's place in society because she is meant to be a partisan public figure. Russell is allowed to criticize the lack of spontaneity in Childe's statements on these issues, but her reservations do not obscure the vividness of images like this: " 'Granting individual slaves their manumission after a lifetime of service doesn't alter the essential wrongness

of the institution of slavery' " (53). The impact of the war on women's lives is central to many of Childe's interests: public service, women's educational opportunities, and women's religious freedom.

Through discussions at the temple, and Russell's participation in the temple's outreach activities, King has a natural tool for giving readers specific information about women's social and legal status in postwar England. She gains additional power through her use of chapter epigraphs which provide a long-view historical backdrop to the world of 1920s England. The very title of the book is an allusion to a long-ago patriarchal dismissal of women's ability to rule: John Knox's 1558 blast against Mary Tudor. The first dozen chapter epigraphs, for example, feature an impressive array of religious authorities and literary figures: St. Paul, John Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, St. Augustine, and John Knox rub shoulders with Shakespeare, Jean Racine, and Tennyson. The chapter in which Russell first sees Margery Childe is prefaced with St. Paul's famous admonition that women keep silent in church—of course, when Russell enters the room, Childe's sermon is in full swing, and she has taken as her subject men's fear of women speaking in church. Her point of view is reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's curiosity in *A Room of One's Own* about the anger of the men toward women; Childe wonders why the educated, socially powerful, ordained preacher should be afraid of what her own diminutive self might say. The chapter in which she complains to Russell of " 'millenia of oppression' " is preceded by a misogynistic epigraph from Cyril of Alexandria, whose life dates are 376–444. The chapter in which Russell explains about Beruria, an early second-century woman with rabbinical training, has an epigraph from Knox on the extreme "imperfections of women." Over and over, King uses these epigraphs as ironic counterpoints to chapter material; collectively, they illustrate centuries of patriarchal limits placed on women and indicate the size of the edifice Margery Childe, a spiritual and political woman, has taken on with her New Temple in God.

Images of Women

While the content is consistently feminist, especially in the contextualizing matters such as women's legal rights, some of King's plots tend to undermine the feminist intent, particularly in *Monstrous Regiment* and *A Letter of Mary*, and Mary Russell's characterization suggests that she belongs to the category of what Carolyn Heilbrun has called "honorary men, neither admiring nor bonding with other women, offering no encouragement to those who might come after them, preserving the socially required 'femininity,' but sacrificing their womanhood" (*Reinventing* 29). Because Russell, like Monfredo's

Glynis Tryon and Linscott's Nell Bray, is the reader's representative in the text, and focalizes the narratives, her characterization is crucial to the success of King's feminist project.

Russell is announced as a feminist before readers begin the first story; the Editor's Preface to *Beekeeper's Apprentice* describes her, based upon her own manuscript, as "a smart-mouthed, half-American, fifteen-year-old feminist sidekick" (xi). Russell corroborates this assessment, describing herself openly as a feminist, but she obviously prefers to stand alone. Heilbrun said, in her 1984 MLA Presidential Address, that "the very heart of feminism . . . has to do with solidarity and identification with other women: how many of us are there, and do we greet one another as peers and comrades? For a woman to be a feminist, I would suggest, is to be where women are and to value the presence of women there. And to see to it, if one does not find oneself where women are, that women are soon where one is." (204). If Heilbrun is right, Russell is no feminist.

Part of the difficulty facing King is that Russell must be credible as an equal of Sherlock Holmes, a highly superior individual. An ordinary young woman could hardly be the partner of the extraordinary Holmes. Consequently, Russell, like Holmes, usually knows, sees, and understands more than the other characters, and when Holmes outthinks her, this is always attributed to her relative youth and inexperience. Russell also climbs walls, breaks codes, assumes other identities, survives physical attacks; in short, she engages successfully in the kinds of activities Holmes is known for. This contributes to the pleasure of reading their adventures, and marks Russell out as strong, intelligent, and capable. At times, however, her superiority can be a mixed blessing.

Russell's status as one of Heilbrun's honorary men precludes any sense that she could be a model for other women. In the novels, she routinely fails to include, support, or value other women. When there are strong, resourceful female characters—Patricia Donleavy, Margery Childe, Dorothy Ruskin—these turn out to be either victims or criminals. More recently, *Justice Hall* provides the intriguing examples of Iris Sutherland and Philippa O'Meary. Both share many qualities of Russell's, including a propensity for male dress and an ability to outperform men in typically male pursuits (flight instruction, shooting). They differ from her primarily in their unorthodox marriages and in the fact that they wear their hair short. This last feature, so much what one might expect from defiantly independent women of the 1920s, is explained in the case of Russell's long hair. Mrs. Hudson thinks it " 'a vestige of femininity,' " but Russell rejects that explanation: " 'I think not. I find short hair too much fuss, always needing combing and cutting. Long hair is much easier, oddly enough' " (*The Beekeeper's Apprentice* 193). In *The Game*, when she must cut it to pose

as a military officer, the unwelcome change comes as a terrible shock to Holmes: "The moment my short-cropped, pomade-sleek, unquestionably masculine hair passed beneath his nose was the closest I've ever seen Holmes to fainting dead away" (277). Of the more substantive difference, that of their marriages, there is again an individuality that renders the relationships unable to serve as models. Gabriel Hughenfort's wife goes by Gabriel's alias, Hewetson. Her husband is dead, and she works in a business partnership with her disabled brother. Iris Sutherland has a lesbian partner, Danielle, but also a long-standing marriage of convenience to Maurice Hughenfort. She is Gabriel's mother, but has pretended—for the duration of his short life—to be merely an aunt.

Furthermore, among the minor characters there seems a virtual casting call of female stereotypes: Dorothy Ruskin's insanely jealous sister, for example, and Russell's cheating, controlling guardian aunt. Even on the more everyday level, it is discouraging to see damaging stereotypes perpetuated through Russell's attitudes and actions. In *Monstrous Regiment*, for example, great emphasis is laid on the lack of physical beauty possessed by her friend Veronica Beaconsfield. "To her despair," Russell tells the reader, "she was short, stout, and unlovely, and her invariably unflattering hairstyle should have nudged the wide nose and thick eyebrows into ugliness had it not been for the goodness and the gentle, self-deprecating humour that looked out from her brown eyes when she smiled" (24). When Ronnie describes her troubles with Miles, her drug-addicted veteran fiancé, Russell's unkind observations serve not to refute, but to bear out, the chapter's Shakespearean epigraph of "A woman moved is like a fountain troubled . . ."[9] After Veronica's storm of emotion, Russell tells the reader that "I felt a moment's pity for the young man Miles, confronted by this red-eyed, dull-haired, earnest young woman with her Good Works and her small eyes set into an unfashionably round face of pasty skin, now blotched from her tears" (30).

Like these elements of characterization, the plots can work to undermine the impact of the feminism in some important ways. Russell's work at Oxford, first as a student and then as a researcher, is important to her, and is endorsed by the narratives. She does not give up her intellectual endeavors upon her marriage to Holmes, even though he considers theology a waste of her time and brainpower (*A Letter of Mary* 32). It is heartening to see a female character who retains a full life, part of it exclusively her own. In *Monstrous Regiment*, Russell is preparing a scholarly presentation, "the distillation of several months' hard work and my first effort as a mature scholar: It was a solid piece of work, ringing true and clear on the page" (3). Her subject is women in the Talmud, and as Russell finishes her work on it, readers learn about Beruria and about the suppressed feminine imagery

of God in Biblical language. The tutor who works with her on the research is "looking towards a joint publication. He has already scheduled a public presentation of our finds to date" (91). A group of visiting American scholars plans to attend their presentation, and Holmes underscores the point by saying " 'it sounds as though you're being taken seriously' " (157). And yet, having built up the significance of both the topic and Russell's presentation on it, King deprives Russell of her chance to present her work: she is abducted and held captive during the scheduled time. Even worse, this loss is never addressed by the narrative. Holmes, in answering Russell's question about how he found her, tells her that he attended the scheduled presentation, along with Margery Childe and a host of academics, only to discover that Russell had not been seen in a week. The novel's postscript, which gives information about the resolution of the criminal investigation, the respective fates of Margery Childe and Veronica Beaconsfield, and the marriage of Russell and Holmes, is silent on the subject. No regrets for the lost public talk, no comments on the future of Russell's research are expressed.

A similar dynamic seems to be at work in the next book, *A Letter of Mary*. The papyrus that Dorothy Ruskin brings Russell, a letter from Mary Magdalene making clear her role in the early Christian church, "rings true" to Russell on grounds both scholarly and subjective. The history concocted to account for both preservation and previous invisibility of the papyrus is plausible, and two likable, intelligent characters—Russell and Dorothy Ruskin—believe in it. Further, its inclusion in the novel allows King to develop some important feminist themes, including the dangerous brand of misogyny embraced by men like Colonel Edwards and the erasure of women's roles from religious history. Russell thinks about how "this mere woman and her vision of the empty tomb was the foundation stone on which two thousand years of Christian faith was laid" (219). And yet the postscript asks readers to believe that Russell suppressed the papyrus because she did not want to make a fuss; adding insult to injury is the fact that she made this commitment to please the misogynist Colonel.[10] As a writer of historical crime fiction, of course, King must either proceed with the fictional creation of Mary Magdalene's letter or adhere to the historical record and discard it. But the loss of the papyrus to the criminals searching for Dorothy Ruskin's will, or in some kind of accident, would not sabotage the feminist concerns raised earlier in the narrative. Consider Russell's part in this conversation with Veronica Beaconsfield in *Monstrous Regiment*, which clearly suggests an unwillingness to wait for the appropriate moment:

> "A better translation might be, 'If it happened, then it is possible.' A good slogan for the feminist movement, don't you think?"

> "Surely not, Mary. The possibility must come first."
> I plucked the sheet from her hand and pushed it into the pocket of my trousers.
> "History is littered with odd happenings that were allowed to fade away into nothing, instead of being seized on as a new beginning." (167)

And yet, given the "odd happening" of her possession of this letter, Mary declines to act. She prefers instead to follow Veronica's model of deferring action to the possible, because "presupposed notions of the rôle of women in leadership during the first century need to be discarded" in order to make these facts acceptable (315). Russell's actions suggest that she lacks the courage of her convictions; this is a depressing resolution to a vigorous novel.

Both of these examples are based on the ways in which Russell's actions and attitudes in the conclusion of these narratives undermine her oft-cited feminism. The basic crime plots themselves, the identification of the killers and their reasons for killing, often run counter to the feminist intent, and in ways that disappoint because they take away the reader's pleasure in the feminist material established within the narrative itself. So, for example, King very cleverly plays on assumptions—Holmes's assumption, but one shared by most readers—that an Oxford maths tutor would be male to surprise readers with the revelation of Moriarty's daughter as the criminal. Any satisfaction in this demonstration of gender assumptions in action, however, is dampened by the vision of a thwarted woman tormenting her father's nemesis, using one of her own (female) students to do so. Similarly, in *A Letter of Mary*, the vindictive, petty sister of Dorothy Ruskin turns out to be the criminal. It is ironic that a frustrated middle-aged woman is the guilty one in a novel that explores at length the dangers of misogyny to women. When Holmes remarks to Russell that " 'for a few days I allowed myself to hope that we had a prime specimen among cases, a murder with pure and unadulterated motive of the hatred of emancipated women. Now, that would have been one for the books: murder by misogyny' " (308), he identifies several difficulties for a feminist interpretation of the novel. The very real dangers to women of patriarchal society are trivialized, and the greed of an individual woman is responsible for the violence.

The resolution of *Monstrous Regiment*, although the criminal is revealed to be male, does an even more thorough job of shortcircuiting the feminist themes raised throughout the developing action. Margery Childe, in both personal characteristics and actions, represents a challenging yet attractive feminist model. In *A Letter of Mary*, when Colonel Edwards speaks angrily of " 'frustrated, ugly old biddies like the Pankhursts, with nothing better to do than put ideas into the heads of decent women, making them think they

should be unhappy with their lot' " (173–74), he voices a commonly held position: advocates for women's equality are ugly, frustrated failures. *Monstrous Regiment* seems to counter that notion, through its presentation of the temple's Inner Circle women, and especially in its portrayal of Margery Childe. The Inner Circle are attractive and stylish, on top of their intellectual, educational, and social advantages. They are "dramatic young women" (39), every one of them "obviously wealthy, intelligent, and well-bred" (42). Mary is initially put off by their assurance and elegance, but her remarks make clear that they are not the frustrated losers of popular imagination. After spending time working on some of the temple's projects, she learns to see them not as "brittle aristocrats" but as "intelligent, hardworking women whose reserve hid shyness more often than it did condescension. It was a pleasure to work with quick minds" (226). Margery Childe herself is charismatic, intelligent, and highly successful; yet she is revealed to be the dupe of a crude, violent, and dangerous man who uses her—and her Temple—for his own criminal purposes.

The short story plot, in contrast, succeeds brilliantly. "Mrs Hudson's Case," from 1997, is a deceptively simple tale that features both Holmes and his housekeeper, Mrs. Hudson, working separately on the same case. The two Oberdorfer children have disappeared; the authorities and their guardian uncle believe them to be kidnapped, but no ransom demand has been made and some believe they have been killed. When Holmes is called in to consult, Mrs. Hudson is in the midst of a minor domestic mystery; when Holmes refuses to help her, Mary Russell sets up a camera to get a photo of whoever has been stealing bits of food and domestic oddments from the kitchen. Mrs. Hudson, a kindly soul, wants to stop the thieving but would like to help the suffering person who has been driven to thievery. The narrative is structured so that the reader learns, with Russell, ten pages into the thirteen page story that Mrs. Hudson has discovered the Oberdorfer children and is hiding them. They were not kidnapped, but the older child (a girl) has engineered their escape from an uncle who is trying to kill them for the inheritance. Russell is sworn to secrecy, the children are sent to stay with Mrs. Hudson's cousin in Wiltshire; once the sister is sixteen, a more credible age, they come forward. Holmes is kept in the dark about this, even after the final resolution. Mrs. Hudson keeps her secret to herself, but takes pleasure in it: "However, several times over the years, whenever Holmes was making some particularly irksome demand on her patience, I saw this most long-suffering of landladies take a deep breath, focus on something far away, and nod briefly, before going on her placid way with a tiny, satisfied smile on her face" (230).

The plot justifies the trio of intelligent, capable females—Mary Russell, Mrs. Hudson, and Sarah Oberdorfer—at the expense of the meeker or misguided males. When the Oberdorfers eventually do come forward, the story points out, the younger brother (as the male) is seen as the important one: they are "the young heir and his older sister" (230), but the reader knows that it was the sister's planning and resolution that got them to that point. The narrative emphasizes her practical competence in engineering their escape. At age twelve, she has gathered maps, as much cash as she could, and warm clothes, in contrast to her seven-year-old brother who regards it all as "a great lark" (228). Furthermore, once Russell has forced her way into the adventure, the issue of what to do with the children breaks down along gender lines: Holmes, they know, would insist on returning the children to their uncle with a warning to him, but they elect to secrete the children in the country. The women rely on Mrs. Hudson's domestic informants and their sense of Sarah's absolute reliability: "It all rested on Sarah. A different child I might have dismissed as being prone to imaginative stories, but those steady brown eyes of hers, daring me to disbelieve." (229). In this short story, with its dual male/female investigations, the wisdom and strength of its female characters carry the day.

Partnership and Marriage

One of the great strengths of these feminist reimaginings of the Holmes myth is the vision of partnership that arises. A quick sense of the developments can be seen by the cover copy of recent editions. *The Moor*'s cover describes the book as "a novel of suspense featuring Sherlock Holmes and his partner Mary Russell"; the next book reverses that to "featuring Mary Russell and her partner Sherlock Holmes." *Justice Hall* simply says "featuring Mary Russell and Sherlock Holmes." Of particular significance is the emphasis on partnership within marriage; Douglas suggests how Irene Adler and Godfrey Norton function as true partners and equals, while King does the same for Russell and Holmes. Carolyn Heilbrun notes that "if the detective novel, for example, required two males, Holmes and Watson, to represent a possibly viable marriage, contemporary detective fiction, like contemporary memoirs, either ignores marriage or transforms it" (*Threshold* 93). Both of these series transform it, as the key figures embody a transformed, equal partnership that is aided rather than hindered by marriage, and both Irene Adler and Mary Russell offer analytical comments on the institution of marriage and on their own negotiations with—and within—that institution.

Russell's marriage to Holmes offers special promise for this task because King is extending in a different direction one of the world's best-known partnerships, that of Holmes and Watson. The differences between Russell's

and Watson's relation to Holmes are emphasized and developed in ways that establish the value of an equal partnership in marriage. This is especially important coming as it does after King's exploration of the traditional coming-of-age story in a specifically female context. The structure of *The Beekeeper's Apprentice* draws attention to this metanarrative with its structure of four named "Books": Apprenticeship, Internship, Partnership, Mastery. In the second series title, *Monstrous Regiment*, Mary legally comes of age, and the ramifications of that life event are explored at length. Like Rose Walker in *Seneca Falls Inheritance*, Russell becomes a target for male violence because she has gained control over her own finances.

The possibility of marriage is discussed between Holmes and Russell early in *Monstrous Regiment*, when he accuses her of planning to propose marriage. After a novel's worth of activities that lead Russell to examine both her own and society's attitudes toward women and male/female relationships, they conclude their negotiations. King's achievement is a rare one; she has found a way to balance many demands for plausibility in one marriage negotiation. Immediately after their Thames chase of the villain, the tenor of their relationship is changed by a passionate embrace. Russell agrees to marriage, but on the condition that Holmes " 'never again try to keep me from harm by hitting me on the skull, or by trickery' " (329). Holmes agrees to her condition, but with a caveat of his own, that she acknowledge his greater experience. She will do this, as long as there is no element of sexism involved in his instructions to her. Russell seeks an intellectual passion, and before accepting marriage with Holmes, she has rejected the "alternative[s]: freedom, academia, a régime of women" (266). She could not be "in love" with Holmes, nor does she desire "the doubts and frenzies of a grand passion" (266). What she ponders instead is the basis for a marriage relationship of equals, one that includes the sexual as only one of many facets; in her period of captivity she comes to recognize the value of "comfortable, interested, concerned, reciprocal love" (266).

In *A Letter of Mary*, set two years later than the events of *Monstrous Regiment*, readers see the marriage in action. The pair continue to call each other Holmes and Russell, but this is not a sign of distance. Russell's observations on marriage endorse its value, while the negotiations between these two spouses demonstrate their equality within the relationship. Early in the novel, Russell notes that "marriage attunes a person to nuances in behaviour, the small vital signs that signal a person's well-being" (30). When she observes that "one of the most difficult things about marriage, I was finding, was the absolute honesty it demanded" (63), readers are given a glimpse into a properly functioning marriage, a partnership of intellectual

equals. This is not the negative stereotype of marriage, where each spouse hides behind a mask or, worse still, deliberately deceives the other. Holmes and Russell represent a positive working marriage, one that honors the intimacy without perpetuating the inequality rightly disparaged by feminists.

King confronts this issue head on toward the end of the novel, as Russell ponders a difficult decision. The case against Erica Rogers requires travel and action; Russell's manuscript requires her full attention and access to the libraries of London and Oxford. This dilemma has two simple solutions—be a good wife, do what your husband wants or be a good feminist, do what benefits your intellectual career—but Russell's thoughts reveal the complex situation her marriage produces. Here is the passage:

> I had known Holmes for a third of my life and had long since accustomed myself to the almost instantaneous workings of his mental processes, but even after two years of the intimacy of marriage, I was able to feel surprise at the unerring accuracy of his emotional judgement. Holmes the cold, the reasoner, Holmes the perfect thinking machine was, in fact, as burningly passionate as any religious fanatic. He had never been a man to accept the right action for the wrong reason, not from me, at any rate: He demanded absolute unity in thought and deed.
>
> Oh, damn the man, I grumbled. Why couldn't he just be manipulated by pretty words the way other husbands were? (295–96)

In spite of Russell's characteristic sense that she and Holmes are different—better—than others, the marriage she describes can succeed as a model. The traits and behaviors it demands are available to more ordinary men and women, and King's emphasis is serious.[11]

My focus in this chapter has been mostly on King, as her series engages the Holmes mystique more comprehensively than does the rather lighthearted Douglas series. But both King and Douglas place Holmes in a different context, asking readers to see him not as an isolated genius linked to humanity only through his relationship with Watson, but in relation to people other than grateful clients or captured villains. Watson, as Russell notes, "always saw his friend Holmes from a position of inferiority, and his perspective was always shaped by this. . . . Holmes and I were a match from the beginning. He towered over me in experience, but never did his abilities at observation and analysis awe me as they did Watson" (*The Beekeeper's Apprentice* xxi). Through the course of *The Beekeeper's Apprentice*, *O Jerusalem*, and *Justice Hall*, we see Holmes's complex relationship with Ali and Mahmoud; in other instances, we see a personal connection between Holmes and clients such as Dorothy Ruskin. While they have fun with the

Holmes "corpus," King and Douglas also show us how the apparently simple art of pastiche, done rigorously, cannot be separated from gender roles, or patriarchal evaluations of "reality." Both authors reveal the gender content of traditional structures in fiction (the Conan Doyle stories) and society (the civic, legal, and social status of women in this historical period), and show women's agency within these contexts.

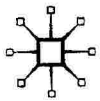
CHAPTER 5

SUFFRAGETTE DISRUPTIONS: HISTORY, CHRONOLOGY, CLOSURE

> *I'd been so pleased with what we'd done for Rose and it had come to this. A wild girl who'd been prepared to defy the world now wore a hat with a navy blue rose, suffered injustice without protest and talked about rules.*
>
> Gillian Linscott, *Dead Man's Music*

In her 1999 essay, "Hunting the Galosh: The Business of Research," Gillian Linscott describes the process of research that supports her Nell Bray books. A former journalist, Linscott believes in thorough documentary research and consultation with experts, but also in seeing and doing for herself. In the early stages of researching *Dance on Blood*, she visited the Tadworth railway station on the eighty-third anniversary of the bombing of Lloyd George's newly built house at Walton Heath; she made note of the light conditions and the environment. Much of the information she gathers does not make it into her books, but she argues that "as a writer, you need all that information you don't use" (34). Linscott believes that this kind of research allows historical crime writers to meet three essential requirements: to avoid errors that would discredit them with readers, to include the telling detail that brings reality to everyday life of the past, and to "[get] the attitudes right" (34). That Linscott's Nell Bray series achieves all of these goals will be evident throughout this chapter, but I would like to begin with one example that demonstrates all three.

Nell Bray, Linscott's investigator in the eleven-book series (as of 2006), is a suffragette, a member of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), best known in connection with its founders, the Pankhursts. This time period is a crucial one for women's history, and Nell's place in the midst of the action provides valuable opportunities for Linscott to provide feminist analysis and relevant historical information to energize her reader.



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