



**“So Ardent a Bicyclist”:
Women's Mobility in *Sherlock
Holmes***

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Abstract

The dissertation investigates the ways in which nineteenth-century women's mobility is represented in the Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The world's first consulting detective, Sherlock Holmes came to life in a world on the brink of change, and was very much a product of the late-Victorian era: he moved through a gas-lit, steam-driven London on his cases, and retired before the outbreak of the Great War. The fictional accounts of his cases provide a vivid impression of London in that period, not only atmospherically or visually but also socially and culturally. Using close readings of three specific cases, "The Man with the Twisted Lip" (1891), "The Speckled Band" (1892), and "The Solitary Cyclist," (1903) this dissertation seeks to explore whether popular fiction can be used as a lens for understanding contemporary social history, specifically with reference to three kinds of women's mobility: bicycling, rail travel, and urban walking. Though fiction cannot be considered a factual record of real life, the choices of the author are not made in a cultural vacuum, and must, necessarily, be in some way representative of the attitudes of wider society.

Chapter 1: An Introduction to the Case

Sherlock Holmes was born into a world on the brink of change: in 1888 he sprang fully-grown from the mind of Scottish physician-cum-author Arthur Conan Doyle. Calling himself the world's only consulting detective, he is known to have existed on the not-quite-fictional cutting edge of science, forensics, and investigative techniques. Holmes came to life after the peak of the Industrial Revolution and moved comfortably through a gas-lit, steam-driven, horse-and-carriage London, and retired to solitude in Sussex before the outbreak of the first World War. He was a product of the late-Victorian era, and we can look to the Holmes stories for an idea of the social and political climate of that era. Many of the Sherlock Holmes short stories deal with contemporary issues of honour, politics, colonialism, marriage reform, race, and gender. This dissertation will investigate how women's mobility in nineteenth-century London and its suburban environs is represented in the Sherlock Holmes stories through a close reading of a few specific short stories published between 1890 and 1905.

The Strand Magazine was founded by George Newnes in 1890 and published its first issue in January of 1891. It was a monthly publication meant for "mass market family readership" (Willis 1998) with "stories and articles by the best British writers... illustrated by eminent artists" (Newnes 1891, 3), intended as an alternative to the more salacious publications of the same period "such as the sporting newspapers, the penny dreadful, and sensation narratives" (Pittard 2011, 25). *The Strand* joined a multitude of other illustrated weeklies and monthlies in circulation in the 1890s, a tradition begun in the 1860s that had quickly gathered steam. These magazines were primarily distributed in railway newsstands and intended to catch the attention of middle-class commuters. Each edition was small, light,

and inexpensive, perfect for reading on the train, perusing at lunch time, and discarding after work (Victorianweb.org 2014). They were designed with a variety of content in order to attract a wide audience.

Sherlock Holmes appeared in two novels before his debut in *The Strand Magazine*: the first, *A Study in Scarlet*, was published in *Beeton's Christmas Annual* in 1887; the second, *The Sign of Four*, was commissioned for *Lippincott's Magazine* and published in 1889. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's first Sherlock Holmes short story, "A Scandal in Bohemia," was featured in *The Strand* in July, 1891. Doyle went on to publish the rest of the sixty Holmes stories in *The Strand*, including the serialised novel *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901-1902) which is purported to have increased *The Strand's* circulation to 30,000 (Willis 1998). The stories take place all over England, and some of them even venture further afield to India, Australia, and North America, but London looms large throughout the canon.

Of all Holmes's clients across sixty cases, twelve are women. These clients vary as to their social class, marital or familial situation, and place of residence, but in order to consult Holmes on their "little problems," as Holmes calls his cases on several occasions ("A Scandal in Bohemia," "The Red-Headed League," "A Case of Identity," "The Blue Carbuncle," etc.), they have to move through the city of London. Many come unaccompanied, some concerned for their privacy and the sensitive nature of their case, some simply lacking male chaperones. Because the Sherlock Holmes stories are fiction, the details of their movement are the result of deliberate choices upon the part of the author, and must therefore be the result of conscious or unconscious social pressures.

Using three Sherlock Holmes short stories as anchor points, this dissertation will explore three modes of movement undertaken by late nineteenth-century middle-class British women in urban and suburban environments. The chapters will follow a hypothetical

commute from the suburban domestic or private sphere to the urban public sphere: the cycle ride to the train station, as taken by Miss Violet Smith in "The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist," the train ride into the city, as seen in the return journey of Miss Helen Stoner in "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," and then walking in the metropolis, as experienced by Mrs Neville St. Clair in "The Man with the Twisted Lip."

In each chapter, I will investigate the ways that the portrayals, however brief, of women travelling in the Sherlock Holmes stories give an impression of the contemporary abilities of women to move in, out of, and around London independently. In order to address this question, I will consider recent scholarship on mobility, women's mobility, and women's mobility in nineteenth-century cities like London, and then apply that scholarship to the Sherlock Holmes stories. The recent scholarship in question has emphasised women's mobility across liminal boundaries, challenging the notion of "separate spheres" of domestic and public life in the Victorian era. My contribution to this scholarship will take the form of literary analysis and close readings of the stories—which, as fiction, are not actual described situations, but rather fictional representations of plausible situations— to examine to what extent the Sherlock Holmes stories represent or reveal this mobility.

Chapter 2: An Examination of the Literature

This chapter will outline the existing literature relevant to Sherlock Holmes, mobility theories in general, and more specific mobility with regard to nineteenth-century women. I will first discuss the tradition of Sherlockian amateur "scholarship" that is enthusiastic but somewhat insular, in order to show that while much has been written about Sherlock Holmes already, not much of it is traditionally academic. Then I will examine literature concerning the "new mobilities paradigm" and the shift in social science to acknowledge the impact that movement has on culture, to understand the context provided by twentieth and twenty-first century mobility studies to the exploration of nineteenth-century mobility. Finally, I will look at literature that concerns mobility in the specifically nineteenth century, in order to apply that context provided by the "new mobilities paradigm," as well as literature regarding three different forms that women's mobility takes in the Sherlock Holmes stories: the bicycle, the railway, and urban walking.

Sherlockian Scholarship

There is a long history of amateur Sherlockian scholarship that has involved Sherlock Holmes "devotees" examining the text in great depth and at length in order to find out "the truth" of the canon. The scholarship is based in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek practice called "Playing the Game," which operates under the assumption that Sherlock Holmes and his biographer and companion Dr. John Watson were real people, and that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was merely Dr. Watson's literary agent. "The Game" can be traced back to the early twentieth century, before all the Sherlock Holmes stories had even been published, and is primarily concerned with reconciling anomalies and clarifying dates or details implied in the stories. The level of scholarship can rise quite high and involve a great deal of historical

research, but it is usually very self-contained and does not always engage with broader social, anthropological, or geographical academic research. It is in this way an amateur form of scholarship, and does not offer much in the way of literary analysis.

For example, several issues of *The Sherlock Holmes Railway Journal* were published in the mid-1990s that dealt specifically with railway history and the use of the railway in the Sherlock Holmes canon, pointing to a form of mobility in Doyle's stories. The articles varied widely in their topics, from giving a context of the railway stations that were in operation in the late nineteenth century, to the history of the construction of Waterloo Station, to the use of Bradshaw's Railway Timetables, to a comprehensive list of all the railway journeys Holmes and Watson actually undergo (*The Sherlock Holmes Railway Journal*, 1997). The work is impressive in its attention to detail, but unfortunately does not examine broader issues related to the presence of the railway in the literature. No examination of the social impact of mobility is undertaken, only who went where when, how, and why.

The *Baker Street Journal*, published by the Baker Street Irregulars, a New York-based Sherlockian society, calls itself "the premier publication of scholarship about Sherlock Holmes" (bakerstreetjournal.com, 2015). Founded in 1946 by Edgar W. Smith, it publishes both serious and playful amateur articles on Sherlock Holmes, as well as comics, book reviews, and opinion/editorial pieces, and acts as a kind of connective tissue for a vast portion of the Holmes-enthusiast community. The presence and activities of women in the canon are occasionally examined, but issues of mobility are rarely addressed. Again, the focus of Sherlockians is narrow, concerned with the text and occasionally its historical surroundings, but by deliberately ignoring Conan Doyle, or considering him as an afterthought, often manages to ignore the social implications of the stories as deliberate choices made by an

author rather than anecdotes that "really" happened. This is not the approach usually taken by literary scholars, whose focus is on subjective interpretations rather than objective truths.

Serious academic scholarship on Holmes does exist, beyond the scope of the *Baker Street Journal* or the *Sherlock Holmes Journal* (a similar publication produced bi-annually by the Sherlock Holmes Society of London), that examines social history in the context of literature. For example, in *Writing the Urban Jungle* (2000) Joseph McLaughlin discusses the way that Holmes's cocaine use in *The Sign of Four* can be seen as an allegory for the perceived dangers of imperialism. He compares the decadence and risk of the injection of cocaine to the invasion of the Orient into the body of England.

With this dissertation, I will attempt to fill some of the gaps between Sherlockian scholarship and traditional academic scholarship, by using the Sherlock Holmes stories as the literature through which social history can be understood. The theories upon which I base my research are primarily concerned with mobilities: the mobility of women in the late nineteenth century, the practices and rituals of travel, and the result of mass mobility on society.

The New Mobilities Paradigm

John Urry explains in his book *Mobilities* (2007) the way that modern sociology has been changing over the last thirty years, to incorporate the study of movement of people and ideas from one place to another, which he suggests has just as much impact on culture and patterns of interaction as do static spaces. In fact, Urry argues, mobility from place to place impacts the static spaces themselves as well as the people who occupy them. This "new mobility paradigm" stems from "five interdependent 'mobilities' that produce social life organized across distance and which form (and re-form) its contours," which are (1) the corporeal travel of people for various reasons, be they business, pleasure, social, or familial;

(2) the movement of objects for business or pleasure; (3) the imagined travel of individual consciousness through visual or print media; (4) the virtual travel of individual consciousness through interconnected media such as the Internet; and (5) the communicative movement of information from person to person through machines (computers, mobile phones, etc) or face-to-face interaction (Urry 2007, 47). The paradigm also introduces methods and models for research that are "on the move," that take into account movement of people and things through observation of and participation in that movement (39-40).

The new mobilities paradigm describes the nineteenth century as "the century of 'public mobilization' through new times, spaces and sociabilities of public movement" (Urry 2007, 91). Though Urry's book primarily focuses on twentieth-century technologies that advance the movement of people, objects, and information through space, it acknowledges the nineteenth-century railway, and the associated technologies such as the telegraph and standardised railway time, as significant in the consideration of human mobility. The railway system, Urry (2007, 92) writes, initiated "a long durée in which human life is dependent upon, and enormously entwined with, machines. [...] Increasingly, through inhabiting machines, humans come to 'live' and especially to a life intermittently lived on the move in the company of various machines of movement." The railway of the nineteenth century, Urry points out, was among the first mechanical systems that humans came to rely on.

Unfortunately, Urry seems to perceive the technological advances of the nineteenth century as merely part of inevitably progress toward the twenty-first century, rather than an era in its own right. He doesn't take the time to investigate the impact of the steam engine and the resulting increase in mobility on the nineteenth century itself, nor on its inhabitants. He also fails to acknowledge any other nineteenth-century technologies of mobility besides the railway, or to acknowledge that most mobility in the nineteenth century did not rely upon

industrial technology at all. Going forward, I will draw inspiration from Urry's "new mobilities paradigm" to explore women's mobility in the Sherlock Holmes stories, as the shifts in social climate, as a result of the increased ability of people, especially women, to travel, are not limited to the post-World War II period. This is intended to help develop historical and literary perspectives with regard to mobility studies.

Michele De Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984) can also be applied to the mobility of both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. De Certeau's work is concerned with ensuring that "everyday practices, 'ways of operating' or doing things, no longer appear as merely the obscure background of social activity" (xi). His intention is to show the ways that practices, habits, or procedures – including those of mobility – are learned, and can change as a result of an individual's previous experiences, current situation, or societal expectations. He describes the way that walking in a city can disrupt the constructed order, as a pedestrian need not always follow the rules of pavements and road signs, and discusses the way a space can be "read" by the human eye from a point of elevation. In particular reference to railways, De Certeau describes how the train is "a travelling incarceration" (111), and the view through the window creates a "spectator's distance" that is similar to the voyeuristic view from above. De Certeau is useful to consider in the context of this dissertation because nineteenth-century women's mobility could be as unpredictable as men's, especially as social standards changed with regard to where and when women ought to be moving about. Women walking in the streets of London, whether working, shopping, socialising, or commuting, are just as likely as men to subvert expectations of the constructed space, and to change the habits and uses of a space to make it their own. Lynda Nead discusses this subversion in *Victorian Babylon* (2000) with reference to Holywell Street off the Strand, and Erika Rappaport likewise in *Shopping for Pleasure* (2000) regarding Regent Street and the West End. Furthermore, the

presence of women in public space (i.e. visible in the public realm, in a railway carriage, or on a bicycle) can change the way a space is read; in the case of Sherlock Holmes, this act of reading is quite literal.

In *Cities in Modernity* (2008), Richard Dennis considers London (as well as other major cities) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and explores themes such as the building of bridges and railways, surveys and official records of changing cities, writing and painting in reaction to the city, and the expansion and experience of suburbia.

Dennis's analysis of the city as considered through the perspective of modernity points out that much of the contemporary research on the subject of women's movement in nineteenth-century London is limited to spaces that are "domesticated," such as shopping spaces and private clubs, making it seem as though middle-class women were restricted to spaces "such as parks and department stores which constituted extensions of the domestic sphere rather than breaks with it" (2008, 152). He argues this narrow focus may result in the academic marginalisation of "potentially more emancipatory spaces, such as debating clubs," as important in the public lives of late-nineteenth-century middle-class women (2008, 155). "By the 1890s," Dennis writes, "far more middle-class women were confidently exploring London's West End, some of them now employed as teachers, nurses, typists and shop assistants" (2008, 154). This suggests that women were moving around the metropolis, for work and pleasure, despite contemporary assumptions that they needed to be or were habitually confined to the domestic realm.

Robin Law, in "Beyond 'women and transport'" (1999), discusses shifts since the 1980s in the focus of human geography regarding women's mobility and travel patterns. She considers the literature of the previous twenty years concerning gender and transport, and concludes that it has developed a fairly narrow field of topics that get regularly discussed.

She then suggests some alternative approaches to the intersection of gender and transport in academic research. The article makes some interesting observations about gendered mobility and the research thereof, but it is limited to the mid- to late-twentieth century and is concerned with a broad scope of the Western world, so its generalisations have to do primarily with women's liberation and employment after 1950. Law touches very briefly on the concept of the *flâneur* and its appearance in the 1970's as a metaphor for the nineteenth-century wandering male artist, as well as its role in the academic debate concerning nineteenth-century public space. Her discussion of the work-home journey and the increasing movement of women across liminal boundaries are useful when it comes to an examination of women in the Sherlock Holmes stories who work and commute.

Railway Mobility

Mobility via the railway is one of the forms of nineteenth-century women's mobility I will discuss specifically in this dissertation. Wolfgang Schivelbusch's *The Railway Journey* (1986) considers the impact of railway travel on the nineteenth-century social climate rather than purely its economy. As he explains, prior to the advent of the steam engine, it was the locomotive power of animals pulling the vehicles that were "destroyed" by the space— that is, the animal was subject to the demands of the distance and the difficulty of the journey, and one way to tell how far you had gone was by observing how tired the draught animals were. But "steam power, inexhaustible and capable of infinite acceleration, reversed the relationship between recalcitrant nature (spatial distance) and locomotive engine." Now the steam engine "destroyed" the distance, made nature (spatial distance) subject to its power. In other words, "motion was no longer dependent on the conditions of natural space, but on a mechanical power that created its own spatiality" (1986, p. 10). This enabled further, faster, and more affordable travel, and as a result made it possible for a wider variety of people,

particularly women, to move around. It also made travel commonplace, and a cultural point of reference for the majority of the population.

Schivelbusch also explores the difficulties posed by the new sociability of railway travel: Victorian railway compartments were arranged like stagecoaches had been, with the compartments contained and the seats facing one another. However, because the journey was much faster than on a stagecoach, there was not the same feeling of camaraderie among passengers, nor the same compulsion to converse to pass the time. This face-to-face arrangement "now became unbearable because there no longer was a reason for such communication. The seating in the railroad compartment forced the travellers into a relationship based no longer on living need but embarrassment" (1986, 74). The rail journey was more impersonal than on a stagecoach, as anyone could join or leave the compartment at any stop along the way, and accountability of passenger interaction was reduced while, at the same time, anxieties about passenger interactions were increased.

To alleviate some of this anxiety of travelling in the presence of strangers without conversation, reading on the train became a widespread practice. "Fixing one's eyes on a book of newspaper," Schivelbusch writes, "one is able to avoid the stare of the person sitting across the aisle. The embarrassing nature of this silent situation remains largely unconscious: any insight into it will therefore appear only in hidden terms, hinted at 'between the lines'" (1986, 75). This practice was important for women traveling on the train because reading a novel or newspaper could act as a shield against unwanted attention or interactions.

The Strand Magazine was one of the publications whose success relied upon its suitability for railway reading, and the Sherlock Holmes stories were written deliberately to be read in a single sitting. Conan Doyle, who had by 1890 a few novels, stand-alone short stories, and magazine articles to his name, recognised that the "golden age" of the serial novel

was ending because, with the pace of modern life, sooner or later an issue would be missed, the thread of the story lost, and the reader no longer interested. But he also knew he had a character in Sherlock Holmes who would stand up to recurring appearances in a shorter format, and "if only [he] engaged the attention of the reader, would bind that reader to that particular magazine" (Conan Doyle 1923, 32).

Pedestrian Mobility

Pedestrian mobility, or urban walking, is the second variety of women's mobility that I will consider in later chapters of this dissertation. In *Streetwalking the Metropolis: Women, the City and Modernity* (2000, 2), Deborah Parsons's goal is "to examine women's urban walking and writing from a perspective that looks at the gendered sites/sights of the city," limiting herself to London and Paris between 1880 and 1940 in order to focus on "the first generation of 'New' women who succeed in gaining access to the spaces of their cities to the second and third generations who faced losing them during the Second World War" . In order to analyse the experience of a woman walking in public during this period, she first unpacks the definition of the urban *flâneur* as a walker of urban streets, an observer among the crowd, and subsequently attempts to determine whether the female equivalent of *flâneuse* can exist. Some of the writers she draws upon argue that if "the urban observer, as both a social phenomenon and a metaphor for the modernist artist, has been regarded as an exclusively male figure" (2000, 4), then the widely accepted narrative for public wandering is gendered to the male, and the role of female observer cannot exist. In reaction, Parsons asks,

"Can the term *flâneur* encompass both male and female observers of the city or is a separate category of *flâneuse* necessary for understanding of a female or feminine (which are different) urban perspective? And, if a separate category is required, how and why is it distinct from that of a *flâneur*?" (18).

Her answer to this question is somewhat ambiguous: she argues that the *flâneuse* as female artist began to have "increased access to the city as the male artist [withdrew] from it," but continues, "the perspective of the *flâneuse* is... necessarily less leisured, as well as less assured [than that of the male *flâneur*], yet also consciously adventurous" (2000, 41). She also writes that "a reassessment of the figure of the *flâneur* indicates that the concept of the urban spectator is ambiguously gendered," which "undercuts the myth that the trope of the urban artist-observer is necessarily male and that the woman in the city is a labelled object of his gaze" (Parsons 2000, 42). Ultimately, it seems that for Parsons the concept of the *flâneur* is that of a masculine urban presence, a metaphor for the modern (male) artist, but that the *flâneuse* developed into a separate category as women took on the role of artist and observer. This discussion of the *flâneur* figure is continued today (Boehm and McDonagh 2010, 199), and can be applied to the women who walk in the city in the Sherlock Holmes stories: whether they wander or walk with purpose can demonstrate how women's movement was conceived and perceived in the late nineteenth century.

Erika Rappaport's *Shopping for Pleasure* (2000) focuses on the West End of Victorian London, the rise of the department store, the increase in the number in and the freedom of female middle-class shoppers, and the way that the public street and department stores became an acceptable and ultimately *expected* venue for women's public lives in the second half of the nineteenth century. Her work is concerned with the changing role of women in the public sphere and the increased permeability of the divide between domestic and public life, through the lens of consumer culture. Women's shopping practices, she argues, contributed to the breakdown of the social ideals of separate public and private spheres, as they left their private homes to engage publicly in commerce related to domesticity. Rappaport's book examines the presence and mobility of women in public spaces that were previously

considered to be the domains of men alone, such as in the train compartment as a commuter and the street as a consumer. It contains a chapter on "Comforts of the Public Sphere" such as ladies' clubs, restaurants, and lavatories that became available in the latter half of the nineteenth century to cater to women who had left their country homes for a day in the city and would need relief and refreshment. The increase in the number of women moving about the city created the demand for such spaces, but these spaces in turn also provided an incentive for women to make the journey: if they could count on access to a toilet and a spot of luncheon, they were more likely to spend the whole day on their shopping trips. In the later chapters of this dissertation, I will argue that this increase in the public experience of women can be seen in the way that women in Sherlock Holmes travel alone, linger in the city on errands, and move about unchaperoned and unquestioned in their integrity.

Rappaport (2000) does spend some time discussing the presence of women on public transport, as well as the social reaction to this presence. She pays particular attention to women's periodicals, journals, and newspapers, which, among the articles on domestic maintenance, feminism and suffrage, politics, and the like, began to encourage the use of public transport as a complement to the rise of women's urban consumerism. Particularly relevant are the analyses of railway travel that developed in these magazines in an attempt to convince women that the railways and the Underground were safe and comfortable ways to travel, thereby facilitating the movement from home to city and back again. There was simultaneously enthusiasm for and anxieties about transport in general, as it represented the changing pace of modern life, and the presence of women on omnibuses and trains only served to highlight the new urban norms. I looked at several of these magazines, particularly *The Queen* and *The Englishwoman's Review*, to examine these treatises on women's travel on

the rails, and to understand what women of the time were saying to other women regarding mobility.

Lynda Nead's chapter in *Victorian Babylon* (2000) on the public display of obscene publications in well-trodden Holywell Street off the Strand raises questions of the division of public space and private space, as well as the intention of female pedestrians, the agency with which they are exposed to and/or consume obscene publications, and the flexibly gendered identities of pedestrians both female and male. She points out the way that a shop window was "a highly permeable boundary, designed to orchestrate a free exchange between shop and street," or between viewer and viewed (179). Women who peered in at windows took on the role of observer and voyeur, or *flâneuse*, in their wanderings of the city, much like women who looked *out* of train windows, as suggested by Dennis and De Certeau, had power over their surroundings by viewing from a distance. In the Sherlock Holmes stories, the mentions or descriptions I will analyse of women walking and shopping are brief, but they can be considered in light of Nead's work as not so passive or simplistic as they might seem on the surface.

In "Going Places: Women Artists in Central London in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," Deborah Cherry (2003) explores the experiences of another subset of women who moved about the city, that of the artist. She describes the way that the professional middle-class art world was centred around the West End of London, in Fitzrovia and Bloomsbury, meaning that female artists enjoyed proximity to the necessities of their practice, such as materials vendors, print and picture dealers, and other craftspeople. They also, however, needed to travel across the city for study and research, for exhibition opportunities, or for networking with colleagues. The movements and practices of female artists in London in the mid-nineteenth century challenges perceptions of the public/private, male/female social division,

through the artists' emergence into the public realm to do business and socialise as well as the introduction of the professional sphere into the domestic space. Cherry talks about how female artists were sometimes forced to use their accommodations, whether a familial or marital home or rented room, as their studios and work spaces, and the way that this overlapping of public and private spatial practices complicates the simplistic view of nineteenth century women as home-bound and invisible. The movement of women in the Sherlock Holmes stories engage with this exploration of women's mobility in that they are moving between home and the city, transgressing the boundaries of private and public space in order to engage in business and social interactions throughout London.

Bicycle Mobility

The bicycle is the third form of mobility that I will discuss in this dissertation. Bella Bathurst's *The Bicycle Book* (2011) gives a comprehensive history of the development of the bicycle, from its origins in the 1810s to its various modern uses. She explores many topics related to cycling in Britain and around the world, such as socialism, feminism, historical bicycling achievements, and the use of the bicycle in the military, among other things. The history of cycling is this book's main focus as a research text, but she does examine female cyclists' debates about rational dress reform and anxieties about the toll cycling might take on a woman's body. She points out that "it rapidly became evident that much of the alarm stemmed not from cycling's effects on the female body - either real or imaginary - but from the bicycle's potential as an independent form of transport" (Bathurst 2011,104). Bathurst's discussions of the bicycle as a symbol of women's growing independence help to inform my analysis of the Sherlock Holmes stories as representations of the contemporary social climate, and to anticipate how such a story would be received by its readers.

Wheels of Change by Sue Macy (2011) is concerned primarily with the rise of cycling in turn-of-the-century America, but shows that bicycle culture had many parallels across the ocean in Britain as well. Macy discusses how the high wheel bicycle was brought to America in the late 1870s by Albert Pope, after he saw them on display in the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia and then witnessed their potential on the road. He bought patents for bicycle improvements and began to build them in his factory (Macy 2011, 12-13). Because of this late arrival, as opposed to the gradual introduction in Britain over the first half of the nineteenth century, the bicycle craze in America came on fast and furious, and quickly raised the same concerns— regarding health and safety, suitability for women, rational dress, and women's independence— that it had in Britain. This book is a slim volume and is more of a lay-person's introduction to American bicycle culture than an in-depth history of cycling and its societal impact, but the parallels between Britain and America are significant. Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories were being published (nearly) simultaneously in magazines across both countries, and both American and British readers of "The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist" would have had similar experiences of cycling from which to draw to enjoy the story.

Conclusion

Overall, there is a good deal of research that has been done regarding Victorian middle-class women entering into the public sphere. Much of it has examined walking in the city (Nead 2000, Rappaport 2000), contrasting women's experiences with those of aimlessly wandering men, but the experiences of nineteenth-century women on public transport has been somewhat neglected academically. Similarly, there is plenty of history on women moving around independently on bicycles, and how bicycles catalysed the rational dress movement and were a boost to *fin de siècle* feminism (Macy 2011, Bathurst, 2011), but the

impact of the bicycle on women's employment or distance commuting— in other words, the result of the new possibilities of mobility— gets only a passing mention. On the literature side, explorations of the *flâneuse* often originate from fiction or literature that either features women or is written by women, so from those texts, some of the ways that people (women) thought about mobility can be read and understood. Rail travel experiences of women are often relegated to chapters within books about more general (male) rail travel, but the literature does exist, such as the recent article by Robin Barrow (2015) that discusses women's safety and risk on the Victorian railway and the media and social frenzy over sexual assault.

This essay will now turn to close readings of the three Sherlock Holmes stories mentioned, "The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist," "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," and "The Man with the Twisted Lip." Passages in each of these stories will be examined with considerations of nineteenth-century women's mobility, grounded on the literature above, but also drawing from other primary and secondary sources, as well as contemporary literature and periodicals. Though the portrayals of women's mobility are brief in the text, what they can offer in regards to an understanding of social history may be significant.

Chapter 3: Upon the Bicycle

A Fashionable Craze

The bicycle plays a significant role in three Sherlock Holmes stories: "The Adventure of the Priory School" (published 1904, set approximately 1901), in which a boy is kidnapped from his boarding school and the treads of bicycle tyres leads Holmes to the truth; *The Valley of Fear* (a novel-length adventure published serially between 1914 and 1915, set approximately 1888), in which a bicycle left behind at a crime scene acts as both a blind and as a clue; and "The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist" (published 1903, set 1895), in which a young lady is pursued on a bicycle. The last of these stories will be examined in more detail in order to address questions about women's mobility, but first a brief social history of the bicycle is in order.

The bicycle's history extends across a similar timeline as the railway's in England (beginning in the early nineteenth century and peaking at the end), but its development took considerably longer. The earliest predecessor to the modern bicycle appeared in Germany in 1817 as the *draisine* or *velocipede*: a heavy, two-wheeled, foot-powered machine with no steering or pedals (Bathurst 2011, 18); about thirty years later, inventors in Scotland and Paris both added cranks and pedals to the front wheel (Ibid., 21).

Another thirty years passed before bicycle makers James Starley and William Hillman started building bicycles from steel, rather than iron or wood, and increased the size of the front wheel (Bathurst 2011, 23): since each turn of the cranks resulted in one rotation of the front wheel, a larger wheel meant more distance covered per turn. These "Ordinary" or "high wheel" bicycles were lighter than the velocipede, but hard to control, harder to mount, and easy to be flung off of at a moment's notice. The combination of the financial cost of a

bicycle and the personal risk in "taking a header" meant the market for these was mostly members of the young, unencumbered upper class.

Tricycles gained popularity as safe alternatives to the Ordinary. Arthur Conan Doyle himself, an avid sportsman, owned a tandem tricycle that he rode with his first wife (Herlihy 2004, 227). Tricycles were also considered appropriate for women to ride, especially after Queen Victoria saw a lady riding one and ordered two from James Starley for her personal use (Bathurst 2011, 101-2). In response to the increase in female cyclists, a Rational Dress society was founded in 1881, which called for "more reasonable clothing solutions, including limiting the weight of a woman's undergarments to seven pounds" (Macy 2011, 49).

In 1884, John Kemp Starley added a chain drive to the rear wheel instead of the front wheel, which enabled him to reduce the size of the front wheel to almost equivalent to the rear (Bathurst 2011, 26). This development made the "safety" bicycle accessible to a much greater number of ordinary people: the middle-class, policemen, newsboys, and, particularly, women. An American cycling magazine, *The Bearings*, wrote in 1895 that the safety bicycle "fills a much-needed want for women in any station of life. It knows no class distinction, it is within reach of all, and rich and poor alike have the opportunity of enjoying this popular and healthful exercise" ("A Blessing for Women," *The Bearings*, 5 September 1895, quoted in Bathurst 2011, 102-103).

Women took to bicycling with enthusiasm. The first women's cycling club was formed in 1888 in Washington, D.C. (Herlihy 2004, 244), and in 1889 the step-through bicycle was invented to make riding in skirts easier, as well as to enable the rider to sit upright (Macy 2011, 23). The same year, Dunlop pneumatic tires were invented as a replacement for iron or wood rims. Rubber tires made the bicycle's ride smoother and more even than before, and were quickly adopted as a staple of bicycle manufacture (Bathurst

2011, 28). By the end of the 1890 season, Britain was home to roughly half a million cyclists (Herlihy 2004, 247).

Ten years later, the bicycling boom was at its end (Herlihy 2004, 294). Use of the bicycle had osmosed to every level of society, and the novelty had worn off. As popularity of the bicycle had risen among the middle- and lower-classes, demand initially went up sharply, but once people had acquired a good machine that lasted, they were unlikely to buy a new one until the old one was beyond use. Demand for new bicycles slowed, and, although cycling remained a popular form of transport and leisure, the market slumped. Several guides imparting wisdom and knowledge to female cyclists from other female cyclists were published during the period of cycling peak popularity. Mrs Lillias C. Davidson, president of the British Lady Cyclist's Association (1896), and Miss F. Erskine (1897) give advice on every topic related to cycling, from choosing and maintaining a machine to what a lady ought to wear, to the appropriate etiquette upon meeting other cyclists, traffic, or livestock in the road. They cover town cycling versus country cycling, how to climb hills, and what safety equipment to carry at all times. These two books provide an excellent snapshot of how cycling was perceived and undertaken at the end of the nineteenth century, where and why women cycled, and how cycling made women feel. The tone of the books is celebratory of women's emancipation from the domestic sphere, pointing out the way that cycling can provide a physical escape from ailments both mental and physical, and that it is clear in the text that the authors expect the independence of women to grow as a result of the bicycle.

"The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist"

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote and published "The Adventure of the Solitary Cyclist" in 1903, after the bicycle craze in America and Britain had more or less ended, but set it at the

height of bicycle popularity: the case is dated by Watson to have begun on the 23rd of April,

1895. When Miss Smith arrives, Holmes remarks at once upon her status as a cyclist:

"At least it cannot be your health," said he, as his keen eyes darted over her; "so ardent a bicyclist must be full of energy."

She glanced down in surprise at her own feet, and I observed the slight roughening of the side of the sole caused by the friction of the edge of the pedal.

"Yes, I bicycle a good deal, Mr. Holmes, and that has something to do with my visit to you to-day." (Conan Doyle 2007, 905-906)

Female cyclists were not *outré* in the 1890s, not as they had been a decade earlier, and so Miss Smith's cycling arouses only professional interest in Holmes and Watson (and the readers) rather than derision or confusion. As Mrs Lillias Davidson predicted, cycling for women had "not only become a national, but a universal institution, and women all over the world are going to be the better for it both in mind and body" (1896, 11). Miss Erskine wrote (1897, 8), "As a healthful form of exercise, in moderation, cycling stands in an exceptionally favourable position." Holmes comments specifically on Miss Smith's visible state of good health, attributing it to her bicycling. A significant element of this introduction is that Watson does not mention Violet Smith's outfit. He calls her a "young and beautiful woman, tall, graceful, and queenly" (Conan Doyle 2007, 905), but mentions of her clothing are limited to her roughened shoe-soles (which both gentlemen can see) and her ungloved hand. If Miss Violet Smith were clad in rational dress, one of them would have remarked upon it, and Holmes would not have needed to look at her shoes to know she was a cyclist. Mrs Davidson wrote in her handbook for lady cyclists, "[A woman] needs to dress for the bicycle as much as she does for the hunting field" (1896, 23). Appropriate cycling clothing was as much a matter of taste as safety, as long, heavy skirts were difficult to pedal in, were easily dirtied, and inevitably got caught in wheels.

"It is the skirt which rules the destinies of women on the cycle; the skirt which causes her greatest searchings of heart, her deepest anxiety, her most profound sorrow. Were it not for that feminine garment she could mount and away without a pang; but the skirt is a thing that makes her pause, and brings grave reflections with it. I must save once for all that few men have the very least idea of the terrible hampering a woman suffers from with a flapping, sail-like mass of draperies." (Davidson 1896, 27)

Throughout the 1890s, as more and more women took to cycling, divided skirts and knee-length coats over knickerbockers or bloomers became appropriate fashion for riding. Miss Erskine was of the opinion that corsets should not be discarded altogether while riding, for although "there should be no approach to tight-lacing", "a pair of woollen-cased corsets afford great support; they keep the figure from going all abroad, and protect the vital parts from chill" (1897, 22). By 1895, the British magazine *Cycling* expressed the opinion that "a girl in jacket and knee breeches could cycle through a town without being criticised or even noticed; in some places she might still be the object of curiosity, but not of astonishment or indignation" (quoted in Burstall 2004, 130). Popular opinion supported rational dress: cycling had forced the issue of clothing reform for women as no other recreational past-time had been able to (Herlihy 2004, 266). Nevertheless, from Watson's silence we can assume that Miss Smith does not wear a rational dress cycling costume into the Baker Street sitting room.

Miss Smith explains why she has come to consult Holmes: she has taken a position as a music teacher and governess for the ten-year-old daughter of a Mr Carruthers, a return migrant from South Africa who now lives in Charlington, six miles from Farnham in Surrey.

"And now, Mr. Holmes, I come at last to the special thing which has caused me to ask your advice to-day. You must know that every Saturday forenoon I ride on my bicycle to Farnham Station in order to get the 12.22 to town. The road from Chiltern Grange is a lonely one, and at one spot it is particularly so, for it lies for over a mile between Charlington Heath upon one side and the woods which lie round Charlington Hall upon the other. You could not find a more lonely tract of road anywhere, and it is quite rare to meet so much as a cart, or a peasant, until you reach the high road near Crooksbury Hill." (Conan Doyle 2007, 907-908)

She is also undertaking a significant commute (even on flat, well-paved roads, six miles would take a rider about forty-five minutes) from her place of employment to the train station. She is a middle-class working woman with her own transportation: emblematic of nineteenth-century feminist independence. The £100 per annum Miss Smith was receiving (a generous salary that Holmes takes note of) would have allowed her to purchase a new bicycle, despite the cost. Miss Erskine assured her readers in 1897 that "many small country makers turn out excellent machines at from £14 to £16" (36). She acknowledges that this figure is almost equivalent to the cost of a pony, but she reminds cyclists that owning a bicycle required none of the same outfitting, feeding, and maintenance, beyond "not... more than a careful five minute's cleaning, and fair handling" (1897, 8-9). A bicycle was a sensible choice for a young lady who worked for a living.

Miss Smith continues with the statement of her case:

"Two weeks ago I was passing this place when I chanced to look back over my shoulder, and about two hundred yards behind me I saw a man, also on a bicycle. He seemed to be a middle-aged man, with a short, dark beard. I looked back before I reached Farnham, but the man was gone, so I thought no more about it. But you can imagine how surprised I was, Mr. Holmes, when on my return on the Monday I saw the same man on the same stretch of road. My astonishment was increased when the incident occurred again, exactly as before, on the following Saturday and Monday. He always kept his distance and did not molest me in any way, but still it certainly was very odd. I mentioned it to Mr. Carruthers, who seemed interested in what I said, and told me that he had ordered a horse and trap, so that in future I should not pass over these lonely roads without some companion." (Conan Doyle 2007, 908)

Anxieties about nineteenth-century women cycling alone had to do with both safety and propriety. Could women ride unaccompanied at the risk of encountering strangers? Miss Erskine wrote, "Riding in company is a certain safeguard against annoyance from tramps, though I think a lady, inconspicuously dressed and riding quietly alone in daylight, has little to fear" (1897, 138), while Mrs Davidson assured her readers, "In most parts of the country it is, fortunately, quite safe for a lady to ride alone without any fear of molestation" (1896, 36).

Still, the need to reassure suggests that there were concerns about safety, despite the growing confidence and independence of female cyclists.

Herlihy notes that "women appeared surprisingly less receptive to conventional male courtesies [such as a tip of a hat, an offer of assistance, etc] while they were on their wheels as opposed to exercising on a golf course or the tennis court" (2004, 271). Miss Erskine encouraged lady cyclists to be familiar with their machines and to know how to repair them when necessary. "It is the independence enjoyed that makes cycling so delightful," she wrote (1897, 126), "and this cannot be appreciated to the full without being quite self-contained."

Mr Carruthers, rather than offering to ride with Miss Smith as her chaperone, suggests that she stop riding altogether and instead take a trap (with a groom to drive it) to make her trip to the station. This could be read as Carruthers disapproving of Miss Smith's bicycle journeys, and not wishing to be associated with a lady cyclist, but the reality is that it is *he* who is the follower, since he suspects there is a sinister plot by fellow ex-South-African Mr Woodley to kidnap and marry her. Carruthers has been following her in order to allow her to maintain her habit of bicycling, because she has every right to be on the road and remain unmolested.

The horse and trap do not arrive by the next time Miss Smith wishes to ride to the station, so she again takes her bicycle, and again is followed by this stranger (Carruthers). She slows, in the hopes that he will pass her, and then stops, but the stranger does the same. She lays a trap for him by waiting around a corner, but he never arrives. She obviously does not feel threatened by this other rider, since he deliberately keeps his distance, and, as Holmes points out, evidently wishes to keep his identity hidden from her. Her decision to confront her stalker suggests a degree of agency and power for her as a female cyclist, despite more widespread concerns that she might be in danger alone on the road or assumptions that

she ought not have access to public spaces. Still, at the same time she must feel some level of anxiety about it, otherwise she would never have consulted a detective. This demonstrates the way that anxiety and confidence could exist simultaneously when it came to opinions about women on bicycles.

Holmes agrees to look into the matter, and sends Watson to Farnham to gather information. Watson arrives along Miss Smith's cycling route to watch her go by, and is there to see the mysterious cyclist fall in behind her. Watson writes:

"In all the broad landscape those were the only moving figures, the graceful girl sitting very straight upon her machine, and the man behind her bending low over his handle-bar, with a curiously furtive suggestion in every movement." (Conan Doyle 2007, 910)

Because she is sitting upright, we know she must be riding a step-through bicycle, which would have been the most socially appropriate machine for her to ride. For the Victorian, "the results of sitting astride a machine and then leading forward were too horrible to contemplate," writes Bathurst (2011, 103-104), because that "constant friction of the saddle on the genitalia must inevitably lead to... a state of frenzied arousal." The desire to control women's sexuality arose from the need to maintain a strict division between the masculine and the feminine: a sex drive was most unladylike, and if women were stimulated by bicycle rides, then they might cease to need men for other things, and consider entering where they were "unwelcome," such as in business, athletics, and possibly even politics (Herlihy 2004, 270). Miss Smith's status as an unmarried woman could have been particularly culturally threatening because she would be seen as more vulnerable and in need of protection, except that she was riding around on her bicycle. Conan Doyle does provide her with a fiancé, giving her solid grounds upon which to reject Carruther's proposal of marriage, who also serves to protect her virtue on the bicycle. Though she is single during the course of the story,

she is spoken for and intends to get married, so her independence will be necessarily curtailed in the future.

Eventually the mysterious cyclist is revealed as Carruthers, when disaster (the kidnapping Carruthers predicted) befalls Miss Smith while she is, significantly, riding in the trap rather than on her bicycle. Had she been on the bicycle, she might have escaped the attack when it finally came.

Conclusion

Robin Law (1999, 71) writes, "The work-trip is the single human activity that most clearly bridges the symbolic and spatial distance between public and private which is a feature of western urbanism." Because Violet Smith's employment as music teacher and governess is of a domestic nature, she is engaged in both production and reproduction, and Chiltern Grange is both work and home for her. Her commute takes her away from a dual-purpose space to a place of leisure, or perhaps non-economic work, at the residence of her mother. Paying attention to Miss Smith's bicycle trips "unsettles the neat binary of separate spheres, and forces us to recognize the messy interwoven reality of daily live" (Law 1999, 71).

The bicycle itself is an important vehicle upon which Miss Smith travels, because it demonstrates her independence as well as the social acceptance of that independence. Holmes never suggests that she ought not to be riding, but instead works to identify her follower and discover his motives, and when danger does actually befall her, it is in the company of the groom driving the trap, and not alone on her bicycle. For Miss Smith, upon her bicycle is where she is safest. United States feminist Susan B. Anthony wrote in 1896, "Let me tell you what I think of bicycling. I think it has done more for the emancipation of women than

anything else in the world" (quoted in Bathurst 2011, 101). Still, the story presents the intersection of independence and anxiety as the new freedoms enjoyed by women on bicycles could be threatened by a man in pursuit.

Chapter 4: A Short Railway Journey

On the Rails

Whether a lady arrived at the railway station on her bicycle, in a dog cart, or on foot, the next inevitable step in a commute to London would be to board a train. The first public railway in Britain opened almost at the same time as the first ancestor of the bicycle was invented, but its development was much more rapid and widespread. The first railway line between British cities, Liverpool to Manchester, opened in 1830; followed by Liverpool to Birmingham, 1838; London to Bristol, 1841; and London to Glasgow, 1848 (Mullan 2015). George Bradshaw's first railway timetables were published in 1838 (Freeman 1999, 68), and by 1850, more than 6,000 miles of track had been laid; thirty years later, that number had tripled (Mullan 2015). Suburban commuting was so common by 1864 that the Great Western Railway Act required railway companies to issue inexpensive workmen's tickets. The year 1864 also saw Britain's first railway murder.

By the 1880s, rail travel was commonplace, and railways featured frequently in fiction. Victorian authors such as Charles Dickens, George Gissing, Wilkie Collins, Oscar Wilde, and Arthur Conan Doyle all refer to rail travel at one time or another, using the railways sometimes as major plot points, sometimes convenient vehicles for highlighting or eliminating distance between town and country, or as sites of conflict. Railway travel in Victorian fiction, as well as the evolution of the perception of the railway, is a well-investigated topic (Kellett 1979, Daly 1999, Hammond 2006): the railway is portrayed simultaneously as a modern marvel and a threat to humanity, viewed as "both agent and icon of the acceleration of the pace of everyday life; it annihilated an older experience of time and space, and made new demands on the sensorium of the traveler" (Daly 1999, 463). This new experience can be described as "the annihilation of space by time." Physical space was

simultaneously compressed and stretched: any given distance, "traditionally covered in a fixed amount of travel time, could suddenly be dealt with in a fraction of that time; to put it another way, the same amount of time permitted one to cover the old spatial distance many times over" (Schivelbusch 1986, 33). According to Freeman (1999, 78), "this concept did not become a commonplace in the academic discipline of geography until the last decades of the twentieth century, but it was already in general usage in the 1840's and Marx used the expression in *Grundrisse* (1857-8)." The effects of space/time annihilation was recognised by people newly affected by it, but its shock faded as the population became more mobile and travel more familiar. With the introduction of the "new mobilities paradigm" to academic geography and "the spatial turn" in social science, this shift in perception of space and time was rediscovered as distance and travel were acknowledged as making significant difference to social relations (Urry 2007, 34). However, the nineteenth-century experiences of the "annihilation" are mostly ignored by Urry's new paradigm, as if the twentieth-century acknowledgement of it is the result of better-informed hindsight. It is also significant to note the way that the new paradigm's understanding of "annihilation" makes the railway emblematic of nineteenth-century modernity, even though much of nineteenth-century mobility was still unrelated to industrial technology.

This nineteenth-century annihilation of space by time had the result of causing people to spend more of their lives travelling than before: travelling great distances was both more affordable and more reasonable, and therefore within the reach of a wider population. Rail travel also expanded leisure time, even if it was an enforced leisure, time spent waiting to get from one place to another. For some this mobile waiting period became "an obligatory tedium — a time for sleeping, for recovering from the hectic pace of life that the railways seemed to engender... for others, the railway carriage afforded reading time" (Freeman 1999, 86).

Railways and sensation fiction featuring railways and intended to be read en route developed in parallel. In fact, Nicholas Daly (1999, 464) argues "that we can see in the sensation [fiction] genre an attempt to register and accommodate the newly speeded-up world of the railway age."

Sherlock Holmes and Dr John Watson take plenty of railway journeys throughout Holmes's documented career. J. Alan Rennie (1935, 316) argues in his comprehensive summary of all the journeys mentioned in the canon that Holmes "was indeed more than a casual traveller; he had all the makings of a railwayist." In two cases, "The Norwood Builder" and "The Bruce-Partington Plans," the railway features specifically as a clue to the solution, but Conan Doyle never has Holmes solve a murder on a train.¹ Holmes and Watson are nevertheless regular first-class passengers, comfortable with the workings of the Bradshaw timetables, and often reconsider the details of cases with one another in the privacy of first-class compartments. Those journeys alone could make up an entire study of nineteenth-century railway culture, but we will focus instead on one railway journey made, not by Holmes, but by a client, Miss Helen Stoner.

"The Adventure of the Speckled Band"

"The Adventure of the Speckled Band" was published in *The Strand* in February, 1892 and is the eighth of twelve stories that collectively make up *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. Doyle later ranked "The Speckled Band" as his personal favourite of all the stories (Conan Doyle 1927, 208). Watson writes that early upon an April morning in 1883, he

¹ Doyle did publish two short stories in *The Strand Magazine* in 1898, "The Lost Special" and "The Man with the Watches," both of which take place on the railway. The first features a train and its passengers which disappear between stations, while the second involves a man found dead in a railway compartment. These stories were published after Doyle killed Holmes off in 1894 in "The Final Problem," but contain a mention of "an amateur reasoner of some celebrity." They appear in a Conan Doyle collection edited by Peter Haining, *The Final Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, but they are not counted among the 60 canonical Sherlock Holmes mysteries.

awakens to find Holmes leaning over him, about to rouse him. There is a client waiting in the sitting room, and Holmes wishes Watson to be present at the consultation.

The woman who awaits them, dressed in black and shivering with fear, is Helen Stoner. Holmes introduces himself and Watson, and reassures the young lady.

"You must not fear," said he soothingly, bending forward and patting her forearm.

"We shall soon set matters right, I have no doubt. You have come in by train this morning, I see."

"You know me, then?"

"No, but I observe the second half of a return ticket in the palm of your left glove. You must have started early, and yet you had a good drive in a dog-cart, along heavy roads, before you reached the station."

The lady gave a violent start and stared in bewilderment at my companion.

"There is no mystery, my dear madam," said he, smiling. "The left arm of your jacket is spattered with mud in no less than seven places. The marks are perfectly fresh. There is no vehicle save a dog-cart which throws up mud in that way, and then only when you sit on the left-hand side of the driver."

"Whatever your reasons may be, you are perfectly correct," said she. "I started from home before six, reached Leatherhead at twenty past, and came in by the first train to Waterloo." (Conan Doyle 2007, 559)

Miss Stoner then relates her story: she is the stepdaughter of a man called Dr Grimesby Roylott who married her mother after her father's death in India when she and her twin sister, Julia, were small children. The newly assembled family moved back to England whereupon Helen and Julia's mother died in a railway accident, leaving the two children in the care of their stepfather. According to the terms of their mother's will, each daughter will receive a portion of her estate upon her marriage, which Holmes later discovers will leave Dr Roylott in dire financial straits. Helen tells Holmes and Watson that Julia became engaged and then suddenly died in her locked bedroom a few days before her wedding. Now Helen herself is engaged to be married, and has been moved, due to refurbishment on the house, into her sister's old bedroom. Helen is afraid for her life and wishes Holmes to investigate the strange noises she has been hearing in the night.

Holmes agrees that the circumstances do seem sinister, and he promises to come to the Roylott estate, Stoke Moran, that afternoon, after some local investigation. Satisfied for the present, Miss Stoner departs.

The first part of the conversation to take note of is Miss Stoner's "You know me, then?" to Holmes's observation that she has traveled by train. This suggests that rail travel is a regular part of her life, and that she thinks he might have observed her on a train in the past or know her from her commute. She is familiar with the timetables, able to catch the first train of the day, and her regular travel on the railway is a significant indicator of her independence as a middle-class woman.

Instead of recognising her from regular journeys, Holmes has seen the second half of the return ticket in Miss Stoner's hand. It cannot be said definitively, but given her social position—her stepfather, however objectionable personally, is both a doctor and a member of a landed family with a manor house—it is unlikely that she travelled in a communal third-class carriage with wooden bench seats. A first- or second-class compartment, with its plush seats and its privacy and isolation is much more suitable to a woman of that standing.

The divided compartments of first- and second-class caused some anxiety among travellers, especially with regard to women travelling unchaperoned, which women did regularly despite "constant warnings about the safety and propriety of unaccompanied rail travel for women," (Bailey 2004, 7). First- and second-class compartments were separated from one another, resulting in "total optical and acoustical isolation" that "caused the travelers' interrelationships to change from mere embarrassment at silence to fear of potential mutual threat" (Schivelbusch 1986, 79). Their doors initially only opened outwards onto the station platform rather than onto a central corridor; the suggestion of adding a corridor was, however, objectionable to many first-class riders, as they were thought to "lessen the capacity

of the train by at least a fourth... Then, again, each compartment is open to the access and inspection of the passengers passing along the corridors, and that seclusion which is so much valued by English travellers is entirely done away with" (*The Queen* 1896, 294). Passengers were simultaneously anxious about being alone with strangers with no access to assistance if it were needed, and fiercely protective of their own privacy.

Miss Stoner was certainly travelling alone. Holmes points out the mud spatter on the arm of her jacket as an indication that she sat beside the driver of a dog-cart, which is a two-person vehicle. She also admits to having no friends, except for those she has met through her aunt (including her fiancé), due to her stepfather's "violence of temper approaching to mania," and she has deliberately traveled on her own to consult Holmes in order to avoid Dr Roylott's notice. She is also travelling very early in the morning, reaching Leatherhead at twenty past six. It is barely half-past seven by the time she is telling her story to Holmes and Watson. It is very likely, therefore, that she travelled in the same compartment as men commuting to the city. If she were travelling for leisure, a more appropriate time to travel might have been midmorning or later, when "suburban women out shopping or taking in a theatre matinee might have the train to themselves outside of rush hours" (Bailey 2004, 10). However, since she is essentially travelling for business in coming to consult Holmes, it is not unreasonable for her to be commuting at an early hour. She challenges the assumptions of the reasons women would travel by making this trip, indicating that the boundaries between male and female travel were not strictly delineated.

Concerns about women travelling alone were addressed by some railway companies by the introduction of Ladies Only compartments, but the attempts were "half-hearted" (Rappaport 2000, 123) and seem to have become less common by the 1880s (Urry 2007, 105). "On the one hand," read an anonymous article in the ladies' periodical *The Queen*

(1896, 294), "it is said by the railway companies that when they are made available ladies seldom use them, and, on the other hand, that they are not universally used because they are so greatly overcrowded." The article concluded, however, that while ladies' compartments ought to be provided upon request, "the dangers of ladies travelling alone have been very greatly overrated," and suggested "there is no doubt that a woman is much safer from assault or violence in a railway carriage than when walking alone in the street" (Ibid.).

Helen Stoner reaches London on her own without complaint; the briefness of the mention of the rail journey is significant in itself, that she did not suffer further alarm or harassment along the way. Her only fear, as she sits in the sitting room at Baker Street, is of the unnatural death her sister suffered in the domestic setting of their home. Nor is she afraid of the train journey itself, despite the manner of her mother's death: the late Mrs Roylott "was killed eight years ago in a railway accident near Crewe" (Conan Doyle 2007, 561). Ian Carter (2001, 203) writes of a trend in popular Victorian fiction that casts the railway experience as a fear of both internal and external threats, where "few trains arrive at their destination carrying the complement of living passengers with which they started. Beyond this, strikingly large numbers of characters perish in railway accidents." As De Sapio explains, the anxiety surrounding the railway in these situations is "of strangers (internal), and the speed and pace of technology (external)". But Helen Stoner expresses fear of neither strangers nor accidental death, riding comfortably into London on an early train. Instead, the railway offers an escape from the danger of her domestic situation where her sister died and her own safety is in question on a daily basis.

Before she goes home again, however, she says, "I have one or two things which I would wish to do now that I am in town" (Conan Doyle 2007, 565). The implication here is that Miss Stoner will spend the rest of the morning running errands, shopping, and perhaps

preparing for her upcoming nuptials. Despite her fear of what awaits her at home, in the bedroom where her sister died, or in her stepfather's ungovernable temper, she is not going to waste a day in town. She leaves Baker Street to walk in the streets of London, going from rail passenger to *flâneuse*, a rôle which I will discuss in the next chapter.

Conclusion

The description of Helen Stoner's movement in this story is very brief, but it is nevertheless significant. She travels alone by train, early in the morning, to consult Holmes, and her admittedly uneventful trip hints at nineteenth-century railway habits and expectations. She suggests her own regular mobility in the assumption that Holmes knows her from the train, indicating her competence and independence as an unmarried middle-class woman. If she travelled in a first- or second-class compartment, as would be expected for a woman of her upbringing, she might have had the compartment to herself and travelled in solitude from Leatherhead to Waterloo; if she shared her compartment, she would have had to suffer the silence and embarrassment of travelling with strangers, and might have perused some reading material in the hopes of alleviating some of that embarrassment. Either way, she experienced the annihilation of space and time that the railway engendered in nineteenth-century England. She does not appear to be anxious about her journey, despite her vulnerable position as an unmarried, unaccompanied young woman; instead, because the danger to her originates in the domestic realm, she is probably more comfortable among strangers and in public. The railway, therefore, is not a source of anxiety for her as might be expected, but rather a sanctuary.

Chapter 5: In The Street, Walking

Women and the Urban Street

Miss Stoner's walk in the city is reminiscent of that of the (male) *flâneur* or the (female) *flâneuse* that Erika Rappaport (2000) suggests was created by women's publications and the availability of Lady Guides: middle-class women who found employment in showing other women around the city, teaching them how to navigate the urban environment without making a spectacle of themselves. Helen Stoner may be "a female urban stroller" who is "at home in the city" and "who enjoyed walking in... the urban crowd and the city's shops" (Rappaport 2000, 111), but her journey, by necessity of time and errand, is not a random one.

According to Walter Benjamin, there were three archetypal figures that existed upon the streets in the nineteenth century: "the *flâneur* (invariably male), the prostitute (female) and the rag-picker" (in Dennis 2008, 151). This separation of male, female, and other suggests that it would be impossible for the three symbolic categories to overlap; this was adopted by mid-twentieth-century feminism and developed into the notion of separate spheres for men and women, for public and private (Parsons 2000, 40). Deborah Cherry (2003, 73) explains that 1980s research into this period linked "sexual difference to spatial division" and "established an opposition between the private and public spheres, contrasting the feminine domestic (and suburban) world of home and family to the masculine world of work and public space." The *flâneur* was a male observer who articulated this division and the unequal power of men and women in the nineteenth-century city: a wanderer in the crowd, whose gendered gaze objectified all that he looked upon, including females. Women "might return the look but, unless they were prostitutes, were not in a position to do their own

independent looking" (Dennis 2008, 151). In this case, a woman could not be a *flâneur*, but she might be a *flâneuse*.

Recent scholarship, however, argues for a more complex understanding of urban walking. As Miss F. Erskine pointed out in 1897,

"Men and women now toil alike. The days are past when men alone provided the necessary labour in trade and profession; now, day by day, fresh fields of work are being opened, and women in many cases share the honour of being supports of the house." (Erskine 1897, 77)

The simplicity of the male/female, public/private division ignores late-nineteenth-century realities of mixed public spaces, and of the increasingly obvious and comfortable movement of middle-class women around the city, whether they were working, shopping, or socialising. The Victorian bourgeoisie itself was anxious about this shift: "they were intensely divided about the implications of shopping because shoppers blatantly disregarded the vision of society neatly divided into separate spheres" (Rappaport 2001, 5-6). Likewise, modern scholarship has destabilised the perceived division. Cherry (2003, 75) explains that in pursuing the profession of working artist in London, women "moved in and across central London, going purposefully to study and research, buy materials, visit exhibitions, and network with colleagues. They too walked and wandered in the urban environment." Like the shoppers described by Rappaport (2000), these female artists challenged expectations about who was allowed to be out in public, when and where, and why, but they do not quite conform to the definition of the *flâneur*. Although the gaze of the female shoppers is reminiscent of the male *flâneur* gaze, gendered, mobilised, and objectifying (Parsons 2000, 47), Melinda Harvey argues that "women's walking has characteristically never lacked vigilance or design" (in Dennis 2008, 157). It does not resemble that of the typical *flâneur*, who wanders aimlessly and enacts his agency through not having a destination, "deciding from moment to moment where to go next" (Ibid.).

The journeys of the women in the Sherlock Holmes stories are intentional and directional, with a fixed destination in mind. Violet Smith's cycle rides are to the train station and back; she is not followed by her employer upon her leisure rides, nor do we even know if she takes any. Helen Stoner comes to town on a train to consult the detective, and then walks in the city upon some errands before returning home. Likewise, Mrs St. Clair, who I will now discuss, walks with purpose through the city (and the City) of London.

"The Man with the Twisted Lip"

"The Man with the Twisted Lip" was published in December, 1891 in *The Strand Magazine*, as one of the stories in the collection "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes." It is set in June, 1889, and is one of the few stories that does not start in the Baker Street consulting rooms with Sherlock Holmes sitting a client down to discuss a mystery. Instead, a friend of Dr Watson's wife appears at the Watson abode late one night, begging for help in finding her husband, who is much addicted to opium. She knows exactly where her husband is, but she cannot go there herself to fetch him; Watson agrees to go in her stead.

Watson finds the husband easily and convinces him to leave the opium den and go home. On his way out, he more or less stumbles over Sherlock Holmes, who is in the middle of an investigation. Holmes instructs Watson to send the opium-addled husband home and join in on his case, which Watson does without protest. They collect a dog-cart from an accomplice of Holmes's, and drive off for The Cedars, the house of Mr St. Clair near Lee in Kent. On the way, Holmes describes how Mrs St. Clair was walking in London when she seemed to see her husband's face at an upper-story window:

"Last Monday Mr. Neville St. Clair went into town rather earlier than usual, remarking before he started that he had two important commissions to perform, and that he would bring his little boy home a box of bricks. Now, by the merest chance,

his wife received a telegram upon this same Monday, very shortly after his departure, to the effect that a small parcel of considerable value which she had been expecting was waiting for her at the offices of the Aberdeen Shipping Company. Now, if you are well up in your London, you will know that the office of the company is in Fresno Street, which branches out of Upper Swandam Lane, where you found me to-night." (Conan Doyle 2007, 526).

Fresno Street and Upper Swandam Lane are both fictional streets, but Watson describes the placement of the opium den a little earlier, when he arrives to collect his wife's friend's husband; according to him, Upper Swandam Lane is "a vile alley lurking behind the high wharves which line the north side of the river to the east of London Bridge" (Conan Doyle 2007, 522). This is approximately in the neighbourhood of Wapping or Shadwell, or perhaps nearer to the area between Fenchurch Street and Lower Thames Street, depending on how far east of London Bridge you look. The Wapping area is more likely, though, with the presence of the London Docks (John Bartholomew & Co., 1906). Either way, the presence of the opium den and the description of it as a "vile alley" suggests that it is not a very nice area for a suburban lady to be wandering in, even during the day. On the other hand, as Dennis explains, even Regent Street was respectable during the day and questionable at night (2008, 149). The "vile alley" that Watson sees at midnight could easily be safe enough at noon.

Holmes goes on: "Mrs. St. Clair had her lunch, started for the City, did some shopping..." (Conan Doyle 2007, 526). Though she arrived in the City of London (likely on a train, explored below), she probably did not do her shopping there. It is more likely that she traveled across London to the West End for a more socially appropriate day at the department stores around Oxford Circus and Regent Street. Rappaport (2000, 126) describes how advertising in journals and magazines suggested to readers that the West End was the place where one would find "the best products and the greatest pleasure," and encouraged shoppers to take the train and the Underground. "By cultivating readers as riders," she explains, "the press encouraged a curiosity in a metropolitan lifestyle; this, in turn, necessitated the

purchase of more magazines and more commodities" (Ibid.). Whether Mrs St. Clair chose to ride on the Underground, in a cab, or simply to walk to the West End, her choice was motivated by her own requirements and convenience rather than by the input of a chaperone. She demonstrates her agency in this ability to make a choice and not have to rely on other people, specifically men, to complete her errands in town.

On her way to the West End, Mrs St. Clair might have also been walking in the Strand, interacting with shop windows, businesses and banks, and public houses, as well as her fellow pedestrians. Lynda Nead's work (2000, 182) on Holywell Street in the 1860s discusses the agency of female shoppers in the presence of obscene publications. Women "were part of the Holywell Street's space, part of its urban discourses," she writes: "walking, talking, shopping, looking in windows, brushing up against obscenity *and* respectability and forcing a constant renegotiation of modern identities" (italics in original). This renegotiation, caused by the presence of women in public spaces, "reminds us that while residential and employment location may be stable, human beings are not rooted in place, and that activity-space is not divided into a sterile dichotomy of (male) public and (female) private" (Law 1999, 574). In other words, by interacting with the obscene publications in Holywell Street, or indeed by simply leaving the domestic sphere of the home and entering the urban public sphere, women were breaking down the expectations that the spaces were so clearly delineated or could be so strictly divided.

Mrs St. Clair "proceeded to the company's office, got her packet, and found herself at exactly 4.35 walking through Swandam Lane on her way back to the station" (Conan Doyle 2007, 526-7). Here we have evidence that she did indeed take the train into town. Holmes does not specify which station she used, but a likely candidate can be deduced from what we know. The St. Clair house is located, as Holmes says, seven miles outside London (Conan

Doyle 2007, 525): not terribly far, but far enough to need to take the train or drive. When Holmes and Watson arrive, Holmes tells Watson, "We are on the outskirts of Lee.... We have touched on three English counties in our short drive, starting in Middlesex, passing over an angle of Surrey, and ending in Kent" (Conan Doyle 2007, 531). The London and Southeastern Railway Company served these counties in the 1890s, and trains from Lee arrived at London Bridge, Charing Cross, and Cannon Street. Holmes also explains that Mr St. Clair usually travels home from the city from Cannon Street (Conan Doyle 2007, 526); since Cannon Street is within the limits of the City of London, that station is most likely for Mrs St. Clair's arrival and departure.

"Especially after the mid-1880s," Rappaport (2000, 122) writes, "magazines like the *Queen* and the *Lady* spent quite a bit of effort convincing women that they should ride London's trains, omnibuses, and Underground. This involved persuading readers that riding such conveyances was safe and respectable, that it was comfortable and easy, and that it could be a pleasurable and even poetic experience.". Mrs St. Clair is riding the train, fictionally, six years later than Helen Stoner does (although the story was published a year earlier) but her experience would be similar. She probably rode first-class, judging by her social standing (her husband is described as "[appearing] to have plenty of money" and their house as "a large villa" (Conan Doyle 2007, 526)), but as she is commuting in the afternoon, at the time when more women or people of leisure might be commuting, it is possible that she shared her compartment with other ladies rather than with men on their way to the city (as described in Bailey 2004, 10).

"Have you followed me so far?" Holmes asks.

Watson replies, "It is very clear."

"If you remember," Holmes continues, "Monday was an exceedingly hot day, and Mrs St. Clair walked slowly, glancing about in the hope of seeing a cab, as she did not like the neighbourhood in which she found herself" (Conan Doyle 2007, 527).

Here we have confirmation that Watson's "vile alley" is, indeed, similarly unpleasant in the daytime, though Mrs St. Clair's journey has taken her through it on business. "Women's legitimate participation in city life was an extremely significant divergence from Victorian conventional belief and acquired a great deal of anxious attention from contemporary social commentators, who tended to regard women as becoming overwhelmingly present" (Parsons 2000, 43). Mrs St. Clair is desirous of leaving her current situation of walking unchaperoned on the street, but she nevertheless has a right to be there. She is concerned for her safety, or perhaps her respectability, as both were "so closely linked with her social status," and were also now "intertwined with how she traveled" (Rappaport 2000, 123). Mrs St. Clair abides by societal rules of appropriate behaviour by searching for a cab, although Rappaport suggests that even women travelling alone in a hansom cab were thought to be "fast" (Ibid.). Just as Miss Violet Smith's movement on her bicycle demonstrated the overlap between independence and risk, Mrs St. Clair's decision to take a cab exists in a grey area of respectability. Uncomfortable walking, whether because it is too hot or because she feels unsafe, she chooses a different form of culturally risky behavior for a respectable married woman in looking for a cab. When she gets in, too, she will maintain her status as *flânuse*, observing the city from a slight distance as she moves through it.

Holmes concludes the description of Mrs St. Clair's walk: "While she was walking in this way down Swandam Lane, she suddenly heard an ejaculation or cry, and was struck cold to see her husband looking down at her and, as it seemed to her, beckoning to her from a second-floor window" (Conan Doyle 2007, 527). Mrs St. Clair rushes to the door of the

house and tries to go in, but is repelled by the opium den's keeper. She then runs for a policeman, and is finally able to penetrate the room where she finds an unfamiliar beggar who claims not to know her husband. This man is taken into police custody, until a few days later when Holmes reveals the beggar and the husband are one and the same. Mr St. Clair has been begging in disguise for years, and apparently makes enough money that way to maintain his lifestyle in Kent. Under pressure from Holmes and the police, Mr St. Clair pledges to stop his begging and to go back to making his money honourably, thus, his rôle as one of Walter Benjamin's archetypes, the ragpicker, is over, and his freedom of movement throughout the city is curtailed. His wife's movement, however, will probably not be limited as a result of the case, and she will continue to be free to walk in London upon her errands.

Conclusion

The description of Mrs St. Clair walking along Upper Swandam Lane in "The Man with the Twisted Lip" offers a few windows into the perception of women walking alone in London in the nineteenth century. In a few lines, we learn how she travels, shops, and walks, in some ways acting the part of the nineteenth century *flâneur*, and in others enacting a more deliberate, female urban experience. She comes to and moves through the city alone, but she takes precautions to protect herself and her respectability when she becomes uncomfortable in her surroundings. Mrs St. Clair enacts domestic duties in public, shopping and collecting her package, transgressing on the ideal of a separate public sphere occupied by men and a private sphere exclusive to women. But the story Conan Doyle wrote does not take issue with or question her presence in London; rather, Mr St. Clair is the one whose actions are examined by Sherlock Holmes as he tries to uncover the motive and the means of his disappearance. Mrs St. Clair's activity is seen as perfectly normal, as if to be expected by a woman in her position.

Chapter 6: A Satisfactory Conclusion

The Sherlock Holmes stories by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, published between 1887 and 1927 and taking place between 1881 and 1914, act as a lens through which modern researchers and readers of literature can view the social climate and history of the time. Specifically, these stories can give some impressions of late-nineteenth-century women's mobility as well as the social opinions regarding that mobility. Richard Dennis (2008, 86) reminds us that while authors who were also city dwellers often wrote about spaces they were familiar with, "we cannot simply infer that novelists... *must* have reflected the attitudes of a wider society, just because they were parts of that society." He also warns against "assuming that authors... always represented contemporary scenes of which they were immediate eye-witnesses. Ideas and images were refined and reworked, often far from the places to which they referred.... We should not assume they are factual records" (2008, 87). Nevertheless, the ideas and habits which Conan Doyle writes about did not arise in a vacuum, and his impressions and opinions of women's mobility— both their freedom and their anxieties— can be read in the way women move around in the Sherlock Holmes stories.

Women on bicycles were a common sight in the late 1880s and 1890s, and Violet Smith's commute from her place of work to the train station on a bicycle demonstrates that. The anxieties about women's cycling are also evident, from her conservative (i.e. not Rational) mode of dress to the presence of her (ultimately benevolent) stalker. The bicycle brought independence to nineteenth-century women in the form of transport that did not rely on timetables, drivers, or costly maintenance, and which could be mounted and departed upon at a moment's notice. Ownership of a bicycle meant that women who worked outside the home could gain control of their commute, and that they could escape the oppressive smog of the city to take the healthful air of the countryside.

Written in 1903 but set nearly ten years earlier at the height of the bicycle craze in 1895, "The Solitary Cyclist" gives some idea of the experience of cycling many women had, from the dress they wore to the machine they maintained, from their safety concerns to their personal independence. Because this story is wholly concerned with cycling— unlike the other stories, which contain passing mentions of women's mobility— it is easy to see several, sometimes contradictory, ways that it portrays women's cycling experience in the late nineteenth century.

Railway commuting in the nineteenth century was a widespread experience, and most of the Sherlock Holmes stories contain some mention or other of railway travel. Holmes and Watson frequently leave London by train to investigate mysteries out in the countryside, but their clients just as frequently come into the city to consult them. In "The Adventure of the Speckled Band," the journey taken by Miss Helen Stoner is briefly described, but several things regarding women's mobility on the railway can be inferred from Holmes's deduction of her mode of travel. She travelled to London alone on a train so early it could have been a commuter train, likely in the company of strange men, but her experience was uneventful compared to the anxieties she has about her home life. Though her mother was killed in an unspecified railway accident, she is not afraid of riding on the train; likewise, travelling alone does not make her so nervous as being in the presence of her bully of a stepfather. Women's mobility by train was common by the late nineteenth century, despite warnings about safety and propriety, and was accompanied by as many reassurances and encouragements to women who travelled. The early hour of Miss Stoner's commute highlights her determination to consult Sherlock Holmes, but it also demonstrates confidence and competence when it comes to rail travel.

Walking in urban environments was not limited to the *flâneur* or indeed the *flâneuse*, or to Walter Benjamin's other archetypes of prostitute and rag-picker. Nineteenth-century women were very much a part of everyday, public life: working, shopping, paying social calls, visiting their clubs, strolling, and commuting. They transgressed across the social boundaries of public and private, male and female, economic and domestic, drawing attention to the flimsy nature of the expectations of separate spheres. Mrs Neville St. Clair in "The Man with the Twisted Lip" arrives in London by train, does some shopping, and walks in the City on a personal errand. When she spots her husband unexpectedly in an upper window, it is his presence on the streets of London that comes under investigation rather than hers. The description of her journey in London is brief, setting up the context for the real mystery, but Mrs St. Clair's presence in the city is nevertheless significant in terms of considerations of women's mobility in the nineteenth century. She moves independently, partaking in both business and pleasure, despite contemporary commentary that might have suggested her presence was not appropriate.

Ultimately, readers and researchers can use the Sherlock Holmes stories to get a glimpse of nineteenth-century social history with regard to women's mobility. The movement of women from place to place, via independent vehicles, public transport, or simple pedestrianism, is an important field of study within human geography, and it can be examined via close readings of popular literature. One of the facets of the new mobilities paradigm laid out by John Urry is the imagined travel of individual consciousness through visual or print media, and by reading the Sherlock Holmes stories we can experience some of the journeys that the women in the canon undertook as part of their everyday lives. Using literature as a framework to study mobility is useful for literary and geographical historians because though these journeys are fictional and the result of deliberate choices on the part of the (male)

author, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle— and therefore are not *actual* journeys undertaken by *actual* nineteenth-century women— they do represent some of the ways that women in the nineteenth century could and did move in, out of, and around urban London and its suburban surroundings.

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