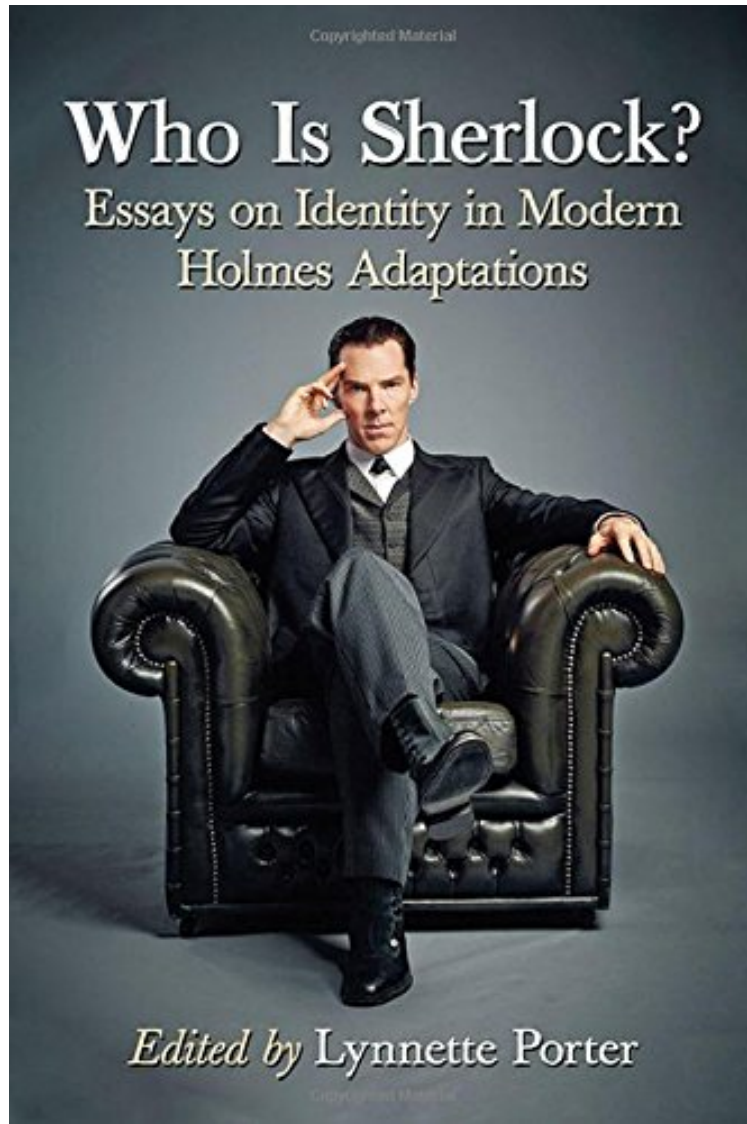


# Who Is Sherlock? Essays on Identity in Modern Holmes Adaptations

*Lynnette Porter*

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**Lynnette Porter : Who Is Sherlock? Essays on Identity in Modern Holmes Adaptations** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Who Is Sherlock? Essays on Identity in Modern Holmes Adaptations:

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review helpful. Interesting Analyses, though Dated and Dominated by the BBC SeriesBy RDD"Who is Sherlock? Essays on Identity in Modern Holmes Adaptations", edited by Lynnette Porter, examines the modern adaptations of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's consulting detective the BBC's "Sherlock", CBS's "Elementary", Guy Ritchie's "Sherlock Holmes" films (starring Robert Downey, Jr.), and "Mr. Holmes" (2015, dir. Bill Condon). When necessary, Porter and her fellow contributors reference everything from Sidney Paget's original illustrations to William Gillette's "Sherlock Holmes" 1916 film, the first feature-length film about the detective, up through the popular Jeremy Brett series from the 1980s-1990s. Porter summarizes in her introduction, Nearly 130 years after the introduction of Sherlock Holmes to readers, the Great Detective's identity is being questioned, deconstructed, and reconstructed more than ever. In this book alone, the authors analyze not only who Sherlock Holmes is or has become, but why and how his identity has been formed in a specific way (pg. 1). Discussing the role of identity in the "Sherlock" special, *The Abominable Bride*, Felecia McDuffie writes, Mycroft understands, better than Sherlock does himself, that his detective-persona also has unacknowledged romance embedded in it. Sherlock doesn't want to be a forensic scientist; he wants to be St. George (pg. 42). This plays a role in how this version of Holmes casts a Victorian Watson in his hallucination. McDuffie continues, Sherlock imagines a John as a heroic figure, treating the wounded under difficult conditions. John is his moral compass as Sherlock tries to find his way from what he suspects or fears he is an addict and a failure to what he hopes he can be: the gentleman hero, the person who can hold himself to a higher moral standard for the people who need him (pgs. 42-43). In this role Holmes' most important tool is his mind. Porter examines the portrayal of his Holmes thought process and brain attic, arguing, In canon, as well as in these adaptations, Holmes is defined by the way his brain has been trained to work. Understanding the mind of Sherlock Holmes is key to knowing how Holmes thinks of himself and the ways that everyone else from friends and family to the general public perceives him (pg. 49). Specifically, Sherlock Holmes' brain and his thinking process distinguish him from other characters and often make him the object of awe (pg. 51). While every film finds its own way to demonstrate the superiority of Holmes' brain and thinking process, Porter argues, Among adaptations' visualizations of Holmes' mind, two stand out as technically superior: the Guy Ritchie-directed "Sherlock Holmes" film series and "Sherlock". They employ sophisticated, innovative uses of filming technologies. (In contrast, "Mr. Holmes" deals with Holmes' memories through the well-known and often-used flashback, and "Elementary", like canon, most often relies on Holmes' dialogue to explain his thoughts) (pgs. 54-55). The visual also plays a role in distinguishing Holmes and his arch nemesis, Moriarty. Heather Powers begins with the Paget drawings and Doyle's own description, which she describes as what we would today call profiling as Victorians took for granted that criminals could be identified just by looking at them (pg. 112). In the original work, the two characters' mirroring of one another is clearly indicated by Conan Doyle, although Holmes is on the side of good, whereas Moriarty is his opposite an evil influence on society. Neither of them possesses the charm that will characterize their later depictions on television or film (pg. 112). Over time, portrayals of both characters have used more attractive actors to increase their sex appeal, but Powers argues that Moriarty remains the more tantalizing character. She writes, Because Moriarty's backstory in canon is limited, he has been largely created by the imaginations of audiences and adapters. He is a perfect blank slate upon whom audiences (and film and television series creators) can write their greatest fears and secret desires (pg. 120). While audiences expect certain elements in Holmes' identity, Moriarty offers more opportunity for variation. These examinations of identity encourage an examination of Sherlock Holmes' continued prominence in popular culture. Unfortunately, the book was outdated shortly after McFarland published it as the BBC completed its "Sherlock" series, offering new material for analysis as well as answering the question of Redbeard's identity. With that caveat in mind, fans of the character and of the recent adaptations will find plenty to enjoy here, though some of the articles read more like well-crafted examinations from fans rather than scholarly works and the BBC series receives the most attention.

Nearly 130 years after the introduction of Sherlock Holmes to readers, the Great Detective's identity is being questioned, deconstructed, and reconstructed more than ever. Readers and audiences, not to mention scholars and critics, continue to analyze who Sherlock Holmes is or has become and why and how his identity has been formed in a specific way. The films *Sherlock Holmes*, *Sherlock Holmes: A Game of Shadows*, and *Mr. Holmes* and television series *Sherlock* and *Elementary* have introduced wildly divergent, yet fascinating portrayals that reveal as much about current social mores and popular culture as about the detective. More than ever, fans also are taking an active role in creating their own identities for Holmes through fan fiction and art, for example. "Who is Sherlock Holmes?" is still a viable question. The answers provided by illustrators, scriptwriters, directors, costume designers, set designers, actors, scholars, and fans provide insights into both Victorian and the modern-day Sherlock. Like the many disguises the Great Detective has donned throughout canon and adaptations, his perceived identities may be surprising or shocking, but they continue to make us look ever more closely to discover the real Sherlock Holmes.

About the Author Lynnette Porter is a professor in the Humanities and Communication Department at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona Beach, Florida, and has written extensively on television and film.