

HOUSE NOT HO(L)MES

Susan Rowland

CSI borrows heavily from the compelling elements of Sherlock Holmes stories: their generic innovation in the serial format, their sensational plots cloaked in a rhetoric of rationality, their conception of the body as a scientific text to be read, and their ideological significance in the conception of the nation.

Ellen Burton Harrington (379)

All patients lie.

Gregory House

Introduction

It is widely accepted that the medical series, *House MD*, is based upon the Sherlock Holmes stories by Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930). Indeed the co-creator of the show, David Shore admits that his fascination with Holmes was central to the characterisation of the eponymous Gregory House (Shore 2006). A diagnostician extraordinaire, Dr. House shares more with the great detective than a pun on his name, Ho(l)mes. Both House and Holmes claim to pursue scientific truth; they intellectually and psychologically dominate their colleagues, and suffer from drug addiction. Moreover, *House* is also like Holmes and CSI as analysed by Ellen Burton Harrington. *House* adopts the now customary series format of continuing characters, 'housed' in complete stories in each episode. Also like CSI, *House* takes detecting as its paradigm, although it seeks to unravel the material traces of the crime of illness.

On the other hand, this paper is going to explore the ways in which *House* is *not* like the world of Sherlock Holmes. To take the list of common features between the comparably conservative CSI and Holmes given by Harrington, is to begin the diagnosis of the problematic equation of House equals Holmes. After all, unlike House, Holmes is not violently unhappy. For the permanently troubled House, Holmes's comfortable serial format becomes a kind of circle of hell. Moreover, where the Holmes stories disguise their irrationality in the language of scientific reason, the House stories unpick the very notion of detached scientific reason and replace it with logos related to mythos (as shown below).

In effect, if a body is a scientific text to be read for Holmes, it is a text to be *mis-read* by House and his disciples. This persistent trope of mis-diagnosis is emphasized by significant story space devoted to the onrush of medical language, a descent into jargon that is incomprehensible to 99% of the audience. By contrast Holmes habitually *teaches* Watson, and by extension the audience, his superior reasoning. Finally, where Holmes and CSI are dedicated to shoring up the social status quo, *House*, principally in the character of maverick, Gregory House, undermines it. In *House* social meanings are opened up for debate, leaving a crucial part of the action to the imagination of the viewers.

As House puts it: '[a]ll patients lie'. Such typical Housean disdain is straightforward and logical only if the text is framed by a wholly rational scientific paradigm. Derived largely from the work of Isaac Newton, modernity's scientific paradigm argues for an essential gap between subject and object. Related to this ethos of detachment, Newton espoused *reductionism*. Here reality was to be studied in its minutest possible parts. Eventually, by following this path, all the different pictures of reality would add up to a whole. Hence Gregory House and his team often begin by ignoring everything about the patient except the portion of the body exhibiting abnormal phenomena. However, I am suggesting that *House* does not simply validate modernity's science. The most obvious clue to this troubling of scientific reductionism and rationality is the oft referred to, '[a]ll patients lie'.

All patients lie, says House, the physician. Yet, if we recall that within the framework of the series, *he himself is a patient*, then this accusation stops being the proclamation of a disillusioned doctor-scientist, and becomes the utterance of a trickster. House cannot escape the role of a patient. We often see him in pain greater than he can bear. The viewer cannot avoid the repeated visual image of House as a patient as he limps down corridors, poking colleagues verbally and physically with his stick. He criticises other patients over their ways of taking medication while ingesting dangerous quantities of Vicodin.

House is a sick man. He is not a wholly rational doctor because he is not objectively and 'scientifically' detached from the painful dependence of a patient. Put even more simply, he cannot pretend successfully to be a great mind untroubled by its 'other', the physically grounded body. Holmes, by contrast, manages, for at least parts of the stories, to maintain an attitude of cerebral detachment.

So if all patients lie and House is also a patient, then is that statement itself a lie? What begins to emerge here is an alternative framework to the scientific paradigm of rational doctor

objectively scrutinising his patient. Rather, the series *House* structures a 'field' in which the observer is forced to recognize his own participation in what is observed. Like the new scientific paradigm of quantum reality in which a wave or particle changes according to how it is measured, *House* begins a shift from medicine as Holmesian detached science, to medicine as new science of interactive field. *House* moves from diagnosis to *gnosis*. The narratives enact a shift from a knowing based upon reductionism to parts, to a knowing based upon ideas of a whole that offers the audience a hope of collective transformation, for we too, are *implicated*. Gregory House wants to evade the psychological exposure demanded by the field by clinging to the reductionist paradigm. He is shown to live in hell.

Oedipus Detects *House*

House is far from the first doctor to take on the role of the detective. Before considering his relationship to psychoanalysis as a modern framework linking doctoring the mind to the analysis of psychic traces, it is worth recalling its antecedent myth of Oedipus (Sophocles 429 BCE). For here is another would-be detective who discovers that the distance between righteous detective and guilty quarry is not what he thought. King Oedipus declares that he will cleanse the stain of dishonour corrupting his city of Thebes by hunting down the murderer of his father. He will not listen to anyone who tries to deflect him from his implacable thirst for justice. Tragically, what is finally uncovered is the double identity of both detective and killer: Oedipus himself, unwittingly, slaughtered his father and married his mother.

So in ancient times, there is a profound challenge to modernity's paradigm of separation and objectivity. For here, the detective is not separate from the base matter he detects. There is no detachment for Oedipus who begins aiming to be a good ruler by taking on the role of impartial, rational detective. Oedipus thinks that he can be an observer who is uninvolved with what he observes: he cannot. In this, Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex* is perhaps both the first detective story and the one that encapsulates a crucial dynamic of the future genre: an assessment of how far is the detective implicated in the crimes. Put another way, one of the most persistent tragic ingredients of detective fiction is the question of distance and the (im)possibility of objectivity in the detective. Even Sherlock Holmes, contrary to usual assumptions, does not manage complete and objective, as in unbiased, neutrality.

In the Holmes stories, a belief in the possibility of a great and rational detective is provided by the rhetoric of his fictional biographer, Dr Watson. The mind of Holmes is a magnificent

machine, Watson avers in 'A Scandal in Bohemia'.

He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen...

<http://sherlock-holmes.classic-literature.co.uk/a-scandal-in-bohemia/>accessed

24/07/09

Yet in the same story, Holmes is thwarted by the intelligence and resources of a woman, Irene Adler. Even more than admiration for her mental brilliance, Holmes is impressed by her honourable treatment of her erstwhile lover, the King of Bohemia. Approaching her, first of all, armed with the King's assertion that she is a blackmailer, Holmes tricks his way into her house. In order to do so, he stages a riot, aided by his Baker St Irregulars. He fails to retrieve the incriminating photograph, which is returned to the King by Irene Adler via a dignified letter to Holmes. As payment from the King for this far from glorious success, Holmes asks for the photograph. He makes it clear that Irene Adler is now for him not a blackmailer but a woman whose courage and sense of fair dealing exceeds the King's social cowardice.

Watson ends the story by telling the readers that Irene Adler kept a permanent place in Holmes's imagination: thereafter she was always THE woman (ibid.). Not only does Holmes not continue to separate himself from his quarry as a 'criminal', and so the object of the virtuous 'detective', she actually seems to stand for some feminine part of himself. In 'A Scandal in Bohemia', there is more resemblance to *Oedipus Rex* than is at first apparent. The criminal proves finally to be an-Other to the strong-minded detective. For not only is Irene Adler's agile mind recognized by Holmes as equal to his own, he also perceives her deviance to be socially imposed upon her.

In part, she is a guilty woman because of the King's social position and his conventional anxieties about it. By taking the photograph as payment, Holmes refuses to be slotted back into the existing social system as a paid hireling. He thereby refuses to accept the King's assessment of Irene Adler and the 'danger' she poses. Ultimately, he aligns himself with 'The Woman' who is on the margins of society. So his internal otherness is acknowledged and no longer entirely projected onto the (feminine) Other.

Oedipus, as the detective who discovers he is also the murderer, haunts detective fiction more deeply than as lover of his mother. As Harrington describes them, the Sherlock Holmes stories are ideologically and paradigmatically devised to uphold modernity, and by extension

the politics of patriarchy and empire (Harrington 2007: 380). They give the appearance of offering a supremely rational detective unencumbered by personal or even professional relationships. In fact, close examination of the stories show otherwise. More truly, even for Holmes, the intimacy of detective and criminal, the impossibility of completely separating observed from observed in the form of detective and detected, is maintained only by repressing and re-articulating aspects of Holmes himself.

On one level, detective fiction as a genre may have been invented in the nineteenth century as a doomed attempt to counter the anti-modernity success of the irrational in Gothic literature. From the murky and criminal depths of Gothic itself, the figure of the detective arises to proclaim the possibility of rational, objective truth (Rowland 2001). Holmes spearheads a cultural attempt to shore up rational modernity and its epistemological basis on Newtonian science. However, his descent from Oedipus is only concealed by devices such as the appearance of Dr Watson. In the emotional and admiring doctor is one man all too likely to become personally involved with suspects. Also showing the presence of the Gothic is the prevalence of the occult in Holmesian plots. What is for a large portion of the narrative beyond rational explanation, displays the full potential of the invasion of the self by forces apparently immune to scientific investigation.

True, Holmes always disposes of the supernatural, but what is revealed in its place is a terrifying and mysterious otherness in human nature itself. Holmes can neither remove from existence, nor wholly account for, the criminal ingenuity that adopts the trappings of the 'beyond nature, super-nature' for crime. So the occult in the stories becomes a theatrical display of what is literally un-image-able in rational science about human nature. The deathly hound of the Baskervilles is shown to be a large brutalised dog only after readers have been thrilled by its spooky presence on the haunted moor. That 'otherness' is for the reader part of the horror of the crime in which the interior of the criminal is never directly examined.

Gothic is a literature that trespasses over boundaries such as self/Other, celebrated by rational modernity. In the Gothic, boundaries prove to be liminal or terrifyingly fragile. Beginning with eighteenth century novels of haunted castles, by the next century it had developed more domestic and generic genres, eventually giving birth to science fiction, fantasy and detective fiction (Botting 1995).

So the detective could be regarded as Gothic's attempt to test itself by generating a figure supposedly devoted to re-instating boundaries of self/Other. The detective is supremely

charged to restore order, principally by rebuilding through investigation the social roles of the detective versus the criminal, and by founding them on a moral order of innocence versus guilt. However, detective fiction continually struggles to escape from the contingency of detective and perpetrator roles. Indeed, Sherlock Holmes himself has to admit that the gaping body of the earth is willing to swallow virtuous and wicked alike!

Sherlock Holmes, Lord Peter Wimsey, and the Bog

In *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Doyle 1902), the horror of the supposedly supernatural hound is compounded by the active malignancy of the earth. ‘Grimpen Mire’ is the moor’s bog that swallows dogs, ponies and at last, the villain, Stapleton. The would-be murderer’s gruesome death occurs just at the moment when Holmes and Watson catch up with him. Described as a place of sickness and decay, the bog is the earth itself in Gothic mode, for it refuses to respect its own boundaries in calling the living to its depths.

Its tenacious grip plucked at our heels as we walked, and when we sank into it, it held us. It was as if some malignant hand was tugging us down into those obscene depths, so grim and purposeful was the clutch in which it held us.

The Hound of the Baskervilles, 1902

Holmes and Watson can only listen as their lawful prey is sucked down, for fear that they too will become Grimpen Mire’s victims. The story ends with the detectives very much aware that they too could share the fate of the criminal. In many societies that produce detective fiction, this trope of the almost shared fate displaces onto nature another crucial identity between detective and murderer. For the detective *is* a killer in an era of the death penalty for murder.

So it is suggestive how far detective fiction tries to mask the fundamental role of detectives whose final prisoners will face death. For example, Agatha Christie never deals with the aftermath of a trial. Here, in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Holmes and Watson listening to the drowning Stapleton, are dodging the more likely fate of attending his hanging. Fascinatingly, the detectives perched on the edge of the bog avoid overtly revealing their responsibility for Stapleton’s death. Effectively, their risk of sharing his end in the bog shows their ultimate kinship with him.

The English author dealing most interestingly with detective sponsored legal killing is

Dorothy L. Sayers. Her detective, debonair Lord Peter Wimsey, also has a problem with a bog. Sayers makes no pretence that detectives can be wholly separated from criminals in both investigations and in dealing out death. In *Strong Poison* (1930), Lord Peter Wimsey falls in love with a woman on trial for murder and facing hanging. In *Clouds of Witness* (1926), he is at one point forced to choose between his brother or his sister as favourite suspects.

Contrary to the ethos of the Holmes stories, Sayers's detective makes use of what I have called elsewhere an 'erotics of detecting' (Rowland 2001). By exploiting the Gothic intimacy with wrongdoers, the violation of social and moral boundaries between detective and criminal (including finding an-Other within), the detective may create a 'solution'. Such a 'solving' is also a dissolving of boundaries in producing a more complex 'truth', one that includes identity with, as well as difference from, the criminal.

For example, in *Clouds of Witness*, in what must be a tribute to *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Lord Peter Wimsey and his faithful manservant, Bunter traipse for hours over a lonely foggy moor. Here it is not the evil killer who falls into the bog but the detective himself.

"I tripped right into it," said Wimsey's voice steadily, out of the blackness. "One sinks very fast. You'd better not come near, or you'll go too. We'll yell a bit... (Sayers 1926: 172)

For a few agonising minutes two pairs of hands groped over the invisible slime. Then: "Keep yours still," said Bunter. He made a slow, circling movement. It was hard work keeping his face out of the mud. His hands slithered over the slobbery surface and suddenly closed on an arm. (Sayers 1926: 173)

Lord Peter is saved from drowning by his faithful manservant, Bunter. They are both saved from the bog by Mr Grimethorpe, a local farmer with a brutal temper. Here we notice how the body of the earth takes on a texture that we associate with the interior of the human body in its slime and liquid qualities. Later I will consider the cultural relationship between bogs, bodies cast into them, and the body in *House*, with its trope of penetrating the slimy, bloody interior.

Now shown to be mortal, detective Wimsey wakes the next day in the Grimethorpe farmhouse. Wedged in the window, he discovers a vital piece of evidence that will help to clear his brother from a murder charge, a lost letter. It proves to Wimsey what he ought to have suspected before, when Mrs Grimethorpe mistook him for his brother, that the married

Duke of Denver has been having an affair with the sublimely beautiful Mrs Grimethorpe. At the end of the novel, Mr Grimethorpe dies while trying to kill his wife in London.

Effectively, Wimsey, the detective, is saved by a future murderer from Stapleton's fate in the bog. At the same time, he discovers his familial and sexual proximity to the man currently accused of murder (for Wimsey too has been stirred into desire by Mrs Grimethorpe).

Unlike Holmes, Wimsey almost succumbed to the murderer's fate in the body of Mother Earth. Yet, through this vulnerability *in his body and to the body of nature*, he is able to locate the evidence he desperately needs. Also, this detective-hero's fate significantly repeats a seminal event, one which deflected him from the life of a wealthy gentleman to becoming a detective. Here Wimsey's rebirth from slimy liquid earth echoes his earlier rebirth, when he survived the muddy horrors of World War One trenches.

Another Gothic function fulfilled by the genre of detective fiction is as a displacement of, and ultimately non-realistic attempt to heal, the trauma of war. As Gill Plain has so effectively argued, Golden Age English detective fiction between the wars tried to 'tidy up' the lost bodies of the war dead (Plain 2001). My own argument has been that the very unreality of some detective fiction is an attempt to overcome death.

When the dead body belongs to a cipher and not a character that readers care about, then the detective who pinpoints the killer and removes him/her, is essentially restoring the world (Rowland 2001). For such narratives, the detective banishes death itself, for it occurs only as an 'unnatural' crime and not as indigenous to either the human or the social body. Born in an age of increasingly mechanised death, in self-conscious fictionality, detective fiction effectively restores Eden, the Golden Age, a world without death.

Hence, the mythical underpinning of detective fiction as a quest for the Holy Grail (Rowland 2010). The detective is the pure knight who is able *to ask the right questions* so he may heal the sick Fisher King, who is society itself, by finding the grail, the sacred object or 'true solution' to crime and death. However, as I have been arguing so far, the fictional detective is *not* pure, in that he cannot epistemologically or morally be wholly separated from the criminal. In these terms, the grail myth is the structure of desire underpinning the drives of detective fiction. The Grail myth operates *as a space* in which some detectives may aspire to the pure (and very self-consciously fictional) role of the Grail knight, such as Miss Marple and Hercules Poirot. While other detectives, at the Gothic end of detective fiction, find themselves implicated in the criminal and the Other within. These 'soiled' and morally

flawed detectives in the processes of detection assume the role of the unhealed Fisher King.

Too often for comfort, the detective either fails to be pure enough, so not wholly separate from the criminal, or, the 'solution' is not the Grail itself but a metonym for it. Here the murder is solved, but what is revealed in the process is the depth of social and personal wrongdoing. So the detective, instead of healing the Fisher King, becomes him. In his own pain and guilt, the detective comes to stand for the suffering of society itself.

Fisher King detectives abound in modern detective fiction, in tormented and drunken male figures. One such example is Ian Rankin's Rebus, in *Black and Blue* (1997). We are also, of course, getting closer to the unhappy House. Holmes's drug addiction, Wimsey's physical vulnerability to the bog, and even the battered bodies of hardboiled private eyes, are also signs of the failure of the Grail myth to be completely embodied, *yet*. Detective fiction incarnates the Grail myth as a trope of *desire* for social renewal. The rebirth of the detective from the earth in Holmes and Wimsey is another mythical trope that associates the genre with natural cycles and renewal.

Now it is time to consider Freud, Jung and bog bodies. For the bog is suggestively present at the birth of a cultural practice similarly anxious about the relationship of self/Other, observer and observed: psychoanalysis.

Freud, Jung and the Bog Bodies

In 1909, when Freud and Jung were about to embark for America, Jung made a tactless remark that enabled their suppressed conflicts to surface. Recalling that well preserved bodies were being recovered from northern European bogs, Jung momentarily confused them with discoveries of mummies in lead lined German cellars. Freud was shocked and faltered. Weakened in his body, he fainted and accused Jung of speaking through a partly conscious death wish towards him (Jung 1963: 156).

It was Freud's diagnosis that an Oedipal narrative was being played out between the two men. In his idea of the Oedipus complex, the myth in Sophocles's play, *Oedipus Rex*, resonated down the centuries because it was an inner drama in the origins of every man. Jung did not disagree. However, their *interpretation* of the myth recounted in the play did differ. Within this crucial difference lies alternative paths for psychoanalysis, for detective fiction, and for the relationship of the detective/doctor to the body of the (m)Other. Indeed, Jung and Freud's quarrel over bodies in the bog echoes in the struggle of Holmes and Wimsey over bogs, and

for the mythical paradigm that relates the detective/hero to Mother Earth.

To Freud, Oedipus's actions trace the archaic desires of the boy baby. The newborn child is entirely fixated on the mother as source of his being. Having discovered the contours of his body in the oral, anal and phallic stages, infant sexuality is mother-directed. As soon as the boy-child realizes that there is an unwelcome third in the family, the father, he experiences a murderous rage at the threat to his exclusive access to the mother. Then, in the hazy chaotic sense that the mother's body is different, having no penis, he fears the father's castrating rage. So the only safe option is to renounce the sexual obsession with the all-embracing mother, and identify with the father's gender. Renouncing the love of the mother is a splitting off of forbidden desires that creates the unconscious. Founded upon sexual repression, the unconscious haunts masculine subjectivity as tabooed sexuality. Oedipus, who to Freud is the one person in history who does not suffer the Oedipus complex, because he *does what is forbidden*, remains the ur-myth of Freudian psychology.

In 1909, Freud believed that his body, in fainting, has taken on the role of Oedipus's unfortunate father, Laius. The younger Jung is the threatening aggressive Oedipus. Though neither admit it, it would appear from the context that the mother whose body, whose *matter* they both desire exclusively, is psychoanalysis itself. For they are both invited to lecture in America, with Jung implicitly challenging the primacy of the older man.

Also, Freud's insistence on interpreting a death wish cuts through Jung's typical habit of analogy. Idly chatting, Jung finds himself moving from bog bodies to mummies in cellars. What links the two examples of the dead is preservation: deliberate in the case of the mummies, natural in bogs. However, what separates these two examples of the long dead is that the bog bodies were all murdered. Scholars assume that either the bog victims were executed criminals or ritual sacrifices to a fierce earth goddess. Bog bodies invite detectives, while mummies are archaic cultural practices. The Freudian psychoanalyst is a classical detective because he seeks for a crime and a criminal. However, he challenges the Newtonian paradigm of objectivity because he knows that one would-be murderer is himself.

Needless to say, Jung's view of Oedipus, the hero, is a little different. He focuses on that aspect of the myth barely mentioned by Sophocles: the Sphinx. To Jung, Oedipus *fails* to conquer the Sphinx, and therein lies his disaster. True, Oedipus does give a clever answer to the Sphinx's riddle of what goes on four legs, then two legs, then three legs; answer: man. However, this easy intellectual triumph is no true answer to the Sphinx, who is part woman,

part winged lion.

For she, in her animal-human-divine chaos, is the true primal mother, the true archaic origin to whom a mere triumph of the intellect is nothing at all. Oedipus fails to realize, *fails to make real to himself*, the original chaos that the Sphinx represents. Hence, he will be horrifically defeated in the matter of origins and birth. To Jung, the Oedipus myth is one in which the hero fails in his true task of separating from the unconscious. Failing to discover familial boundaries, he falls into the unconscious by merging with his mother, and is finally forced to see that he is both son and lover. In effect, Oedipus thought himself to be like Holmes, secure from the bog-body of Mother Earth, only to find himself to be more like the hapless Stapleton.

Oedipus is also more Lord Peter Wimsey than Sherlock Holmes: he falls into the bog/body of the (m)Other Earth. What is integral to Jung's Oedipus myth is that it remains a myth in an embryonic state. The Sphinx in her chaotic multiplicity (animal, divine etc.) has the potential for myriad stories. There are many forms of the hero myth possible here, if only Oedipus would be a hero and truly separate from her. Indeed, the Sphinx as the primal great mother has not just the potential for annihilation, but also for rebirth from the mother, as Lord Peter Wimsey demonstrates.

In that harsh short exchange between Freud and Jung there are actually two possibilities for interpreting myth. Is it *one story*, so cleanly repeatable that it can generate an abstract concept such as the *Oedipus complex*? Or, is it a story possessed of such psychic energy (not always confined to a sexual interpretation) that it is the source of many stories? This is a question equally embedded in the series format of both Sherlock Holmes and *House*. In the repeating format of the series episode, do we have a structure as in Freudian psychoanalysis, in which one core narrative is detected time and time again to a similar interpretative end? For *House*, this might be the ever-repeating triumph of House the diagnostician, even when he has to diagnose the physical and moral perishability of the human body.

In more Jungian mood, the episodic narrative structure might offer more possibilities for re-investigating the relationship of self and other. *House*, as a detective fiction, is connected to both Oedipus as a fatally successful sleuth and the Grail myth paradigm of desire. In Grail myth terms, if House manages to ask the right question his diagnosis becomes gnosis, divine knowledge that restores sacred and social harmony. It is time to look at what kind of a detective House is, and whether he can assist Jung in his anxious debate with Freud.

House helps Jung

Jung is famous for his lifelong preoccupation with houses and homes. He built his own in the Bollingen Tower (Jung 1963: 223-237). Also, in his late memoir, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, he records dreaming of *his* house while on that same 1909 trip with Freud.

This was the dream. I was in a house I did not know, which had two stories. It was “my house.” I found myself in the upper storey, where there was a kind of salon furnished with fine old pieces in rococo style... These, too, I descended, and entered a low cave cut into the rock. Thick dust lay on the floor, and in the dust were scattered bones and broken pottery, like remains of a primitive culture. I discovered two human skulls, obviously very old and half disintegrated. Then I awoke. (Jung 1963: 158-9)

In his dream, as Jung descends from the highest storey to a cave below the building, he believes that each material layer represents a stage in human culture and consciousness. On While Freud insists it is an Oedipal dream of repressed murderous desires, Jung interprets it as a portrayal of the psyche consisting of its collective existence in human cultural evolution (ibid., 159-60). Freud thinks that he has found the murderer; Jung believes that he has discovered a space, or more specifically, the *home* of the psyche.

The deeper I went, the more alien and darker the scene became. In the cave, I discovered remains of a primitive culture, that is, the world of the primitive man within myself – a world which can scarcely be reached or illuminated by consciousness. The primitive psyche of man borders on the life of the animal soul, just as the caves of prehistoric times were usually inhabited by animals before men laid claim to them. (ibid. 160)

There are many striking features to this dream, but here I will mention only three. Jung’s interpretation makes of the strange house of the dream a *home* for his, and ultimately everybody’s, psyche. Secondly, the dream emphasizes cultures as layered on top of one another, implying a hierarchy of values. Ending up in the primitives’ cave, Jung nevertheless suggests that the ‘highest’ culture is a superior civilization. Finally, what also seems to lurk here is Jung’s recent, fateful, conversation with Freud about bodies in bogs and mummies in cellars (ibid. 156). In penetrating the cave full of dust and bones and pottery, has Jung, too,

has fallen into the bog in which a 'primitive' culture casts those it has sacrificed or executed? Crucially, Jung accepts this alien house as his own. His interpretation acknowledges that the house is not only built above, but also still connected too, a very primitive type of dwelling. The cave is carved out of rock and is full of earth or dust. In accepting the layered house as his home, Jung also accepts the cave and the earth. He is like Lord Peter Wimsey tumbling into the earth/bog and being reborn from it. Also like Lord Peter Wimsey, the experience enables Jung to *shift the story*. He wants an-Other story to Freud's Oedipus complex, just as Lord Peter falls into the bog when he despairs of finding another story to clear his brother of the charge of murder. Now, what about House and the bog?

A repeated narrative motif of the *House* series is the journey into the body of the sick patient. Without cutting or further injuring the body, the camera takes the audience into the flesh. We see fragments of foreign matter, perhaps signifying disease, the wet stickiness and palpable plasticity of the body's interior. Slimy as a bog, which stands for the Other as the body of Mother Earth, this plunge into the human body actually tumbles the viewing audience into the bog. Moreover, this immersion into the *matter* (mater) of the human body is always done in relation to the detecting team of House and his subordinates.

As we are taken into the sick body when House or his sidekicks have a theory, were these stories simply dedicated to the triumph of a rational scientific detective, this expedition into the soma would either confirm or refute the doctor-detective's theory. In fact, it is never possible for the audience to tell if the diagnosis is correct from looking into the body's interior. On the other hand, the audience is not plunged into matter absolutely devoid of meaning. Rather, just as Jung can make meaning from discovering dust and skulls, so the camera's penetration seems to reflect the detecting team's effort of imagination.

They have a theory. The audience is outside that theory because the medical patois they use is alien. Yet the juxtaposition of theory and interior shots of the sick body begins to *relate* the immaterial idea, the diagnosis, to the dark matter. And the body is dark matter, because it is 'unknown' in its pathology, and therefore not yet enlightened by the detecting psyches of the doctors. Basically, can House turn the bog of the body mired in otherness into a home for the patient's psyche? Can House do what Jung does in turning a strange (here diseased) house into the psyche's home, one that integrates that aspect close to animal nature?

So Jung is a possible prototype for House. Can House help Jung? In my view, House can aid Jung by being a Trickster.

As other essays in this volume demonstrate, Gregory House is a trickster figure. Like the trickster, House violates taboos and boundaries. Also like the trickster, House's taboo breaking is essentially social. By shocking, challenging and angering his colleagues, he forces them to come to terms with the Other in themselves and in the social order. House refuses to act as if there are rules. By so doing, he exposes contradictions in the practice of medicine and forces his colleagues to make psychic investments in the rules they fight to create or maintain. In effect, the trickster serves to individuate society; House serves to individuate his colleagues. He turns a house into a home, and offers some social lessons for Jung as well.

House causes his professional peers and subordinates to individuate, by testing their social and psychic endurance to the limits and beyond. In a way, we can see House in his very impossibility, embodying what Jung would recognize as psychic stages. Too often House is the *nigredo* bringing a primal chaos into the cool white house that is the hospital. Or he is the trickster violating the conventions that medicine is a 'caring' profession. House does not want to care. He stays away from actually meeting patients, and would prefer to experiment on them rather than treat them.

Yet at times, House in his genius is a symbol of some 'higher unconscious potential' in his suffering colleagues. He can, if only momentarily, incarnate a self for Wilson, his "best friend". All this sounds a bit like Jung traversing the different psychic stages or 'layers' of his dream house. However, there is one vital difference: House himself does not individuate. Trickster-like, he provokes individuation in the collective. However, in himself, he suffers greatly and learns nothing.

The hospital is a material house that becomes a home, through individuation in all the staff we see except House. Here the suffering 'wounded healer' has something to offer Jung. For the advantage of House's psychic recalcitrance is that the downside of representing a hierarchy of cultural or psychic 'stages' is avoided. Like Jung, Gregory House goes up and down in the hospital. House getting into, or out of an elevator is a frequent image. Also like Jung, House finds bones, bodies and dust in the basement, such as in his trips to the morgue or sojourn in the men's room. By having his team discover him in the toilet, a place surely where we are adjacent to our animal nature, House refuses to be inspired in the 'appropriate' spaces. Here the interior body sequence becomes an analogy to House shifting around the hospital, seeking its margins and unspeakable places, in order to make this body a *home*.

In his house dream, Jung is stuck in layers, implying social stratification. Gregory House shows him how to become a trickster in the apparently stratified building. The result is that House could individuate Jung as well, were Jung to challenge his psychic house-home, rather than simply accept it. House plays tricks with the hospital; Jung, by contrast, seeks to wrest control of his building/dream away from Freud's detective narrative of Oedipus. Jung betrays an essential twist in his writing here. He is both a radical and a conservative. A conservative with revolutionary ideas, Jung here adopts the hierarchical appearance of the house and revolutionizes psychoanalysis by calling it 'home'. He is comforted by evoking the forward march of western civilization, while insisting that the 'primitive' dwells within it.

On the other hand, House will not let anyone in the hospital get away with the idea that any part of it securely rests upon the triumph of western values. Here, House's own lack of individuation is of real value as social criticism. For if House is not healed, then he remains a dangerous trickster. While the trickster remains, social values cannot stabilize. So House's lack of psychic development is on the one hand a cause of his immense suffering, while on the other hand it is the text insisting on an openness to its social criticism. Of course, a social openness itself has limitations because it means that the narrative weight of the show never endorses any particular social change, nor can stabilize the meaning of a social evil. Yet, the absence of telling the audience what to think and do does have a very important function in connecting the viewers to the show.

Before considering the role of the viewers, a last note about the journey into the slimy, bog-like human body. Combined with the flourishing of a theory, the journey into the body seems to represent the desire of House to enter the body, not as a fellow suffering creature, but as a Sherlock Holmes who keeps to the known path. He fails. What appears as a pathway into the body is later revealed as flopping into a bog. A bog is the body of the (m)Other that swallows cultures (we do not know if the bodies were sacrificed or executed), maps, and knowledge. Before anyone can be saved, House has to realize that he has fallen into the bog himself, and he must use his trickster powers on the house that is the hospital. Only when House has violated the hospital's coded space, and the coded space of public and private 'houses' by entering the patient's home, can he have accrued enough of a relationship with the other to extricate himself from the bog that is the Other.

Ultimately, House gets out of the bog by curing the patient. The patient's body is the bog. So is the hospital. So is the *matter* surrounding House in his own painful body, and the 'animal

souls' as Jung puts it, of his weary colleagues. Each episode consists of House *getting bogged down* because he insists against all precedents that he can make a diagnosis at a distance from the patient. He insists that he is a scientist/detective, where the observer is wholly distinct from what is observed. He is wrong. Being wrong, he and the viewer have to fall into the bog that is the chaotic sick body (of the patient) and discover it to be also the sick body of House, and even of the hospital itself as a functioning organ of healing. Moreover, like the literary detective, House in his failure to learn how not to fall into bogs comes to incarnate a social and mythical meaning. Poor House, with a throbbing leg and tormented mind, is the Fisher King himself. But what about the audience?

House not Holmes: The Audience as a Detective

Two psychoanalysts and two literary detectives meet at the bog, the open and dangerous body of Mother Earth. Freud detects a murderer; Jung detects the Sphinx, the possibility of many stories, and man's root cellar in the psychic earth of nature. Sherlock Holmes detects the death of the villain, and a disguised revelation of his own role in killing. Lord Peter Wimsey detects his own 'other' self: he is swallowed up by his bodily nature and weakness. He realizes at last that the suspect is his other self, his brother, which on a literal level he has known from page one of the novel. Here he discovers his Gothic kinship to his brother in desire.

To put it another way, Holmes detects the other as also within, just as Irene Adler became also an image for part of himself. Wimsey detects a self after his rebirth from the body of the (m)Other. House detects the audience.

Perhaps in *House*, the television show, the real bog, the real body that needs to be in-spired, inspired, is the audience. In the sequences of the juicy, slimy interiors of the patient, we see a metonym for the audience. In House's refusing to be hand on with the patients we see an ironic representation of our own distance from events on the screen.

To reiterate the main tropes for implicating the audience: Bringing the audience into the body *blindly*, as we do not know what we see; the language of the multiple diagnoses being foreign to most viewers; House as trickster making the soul-less hospital into a home; House as agent of individuation; House in hell.

House plays to 'an' audience. The fiction is that it is the audience of his peers in the hospital. In fact, House implicates the 'external' audience in the narrative processes of each episode.

We are with House in his imaginative penetration of the patient's body; yet we are differentiated from him by his over-confidence in his thread of narrative, while we sink into the bog of sloppy, undifferentiated matter. Like Wimsey and Bunter, House's early diagnostic threads save him from drowning while he finds the real way to save the patient. We witness him doing this by re-mapping physical space with tricksterish unconventionality. By violating hospital boundaries and social taboos of privacy in the patient's home, House stirs up enough psychic matter to reconfigure the body of the patient from being the bog to one reborn from it.

So a particular difference between House and Holmes is the extent that House stands as a creator, a re-maker of the (social) world by forcing individuation, thereby turning houses into homes. Hence, like Jung, he is finally able to offer the house of the patient's body as his or her home. In fact he does more than Jung, because Jung's assumption of homeliness in a stratified society suggests social stability decaying into stagnation. House, on the other hand, is unable to settle social questions; they are rather deflected onto the audience.

The narrative processes of the show make the audience into detectives. We cannot understand our journey into the bog-like body. We do not understand much of the dialogue in highly technical medical language. House's outrageous behaviour challenges the audience as much as those around him. So the audience cannot sit back and enjoy a cerebral puzzle. Rather we are forcibly immersed in the messiness of the body, our helplessness before experts, and our own inability to deal with people who do not acknowledge rules. Like House's colleagues, we fear and suffer. Yet also like House's colleagues, we have the chance to individuate.

After all, House is not the only character. His very impossibility displaces our desire to know, and for narrative resolution onto other characters. Between the core group in the early series, of House, Foreman, Chase, Cameron, Cutty and Wilson, the initial attempt at diagnosis, which means seeking enlightenment by examining parts, becomes gnosis, a way of knowing that takes account of the whole. Of course, gnosis is a diagnosis that has forged a relationship with the body as other, as bog, as metonym for the (m)Other.

House is a hero in that he ultimately enables his patients to be reborn. He is trickster as hero who refuses to individuate; he refuses to structure a relationship with his Other, or unconscious, that would enable him to live sanely. In psychological terms, House is terrified of his own unconscious. One more vital difference between himself and Sherlock Holmes is how he drives away his Dr Watson, Wilson. Holmes treats Watson as a friend. Episodes of

House demonstrate House's dependence upon Wilson. Yet House repeatedly violates their friendship.

House is not Holmes because he is in a detecting framework that does not allow him to triumph over the Other, even if he has to admit some participation in it. Holmes ends 'A Scandal in Bohemia', and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* able to shake the dust or mud from the bog off his feet. He is unchanged and almost untouched. Whereas House, treating a nine year old girl dying of cancer is hugged by her on the way out of the hospital. She insists on her 'story' of goodness and bravery in the face of death over his despairing cynicism. Wilson tells House that the little girl, although dying, enjoys her life more than House does his. This is no triumph for more trickster than hero, House. He can get patients out of bogs, but is unable to clean the mud off him-self. As a figure muddied by drowning in the bog of the other, signified by his constant physical pain and drug addiction, he provokes individuation rather than embodying it.

So House is not Holmes in his 'relations'. He is not Holmes in his relations with his cases or patients, failing to make the clean break suitable for one of superior heroic talents. Holmes can pretend to uphold modernity's reductionism and 'objective' science; House wants to similarly pretend, but cannot. House is also not Holmes in his relations with other people.

Holmes manages to keep some life in his friendship with Watson, whereas House messes up his relations with lovers, friends and colleagues. In the detecting myth paradigm, Holmes comes close to the 'pure' grail knight who will learn how to ask the 'right' questions. House falls into the bog of the other, and so stands soiled as the sick Fisher King waiting for a miraculous healing.

To sum up, House is not Holmes in his relations to the other as unconscious, body, nature, other people etc.. Holmes understands the dangers of the bog and knows how to stay on the path to avoid it. In this he is like Freud, who offers *one path only*, but a secure one, around the bog in the narrative thread of the Oedipus complex. House is close to Jung in immersing himself in the bog and trusting in its powers to enable rebirth. However, he only trusts in the powers of the bog to give rebirth for his patients, not for himself. He is ultimately not Holmes because he is terrified of his own powers of chaos, of him-self. House is so terrified of his unconscious self that he remains stuck in it. He is always drowning in the bog of his other. House's link to the body of the (m)Other, to nature as Mother Earth, is a terrible chaos that he refuses to try to individuate or heal.

Hence House is in hell. He is in hell because drowning in the bog of the (m)Other is for him a torment. He is in hell because each episode in the series is a terrible circling for him, without progress, while other characters describe a spiral movement. Each episode has had a similar narrative arc. The patients get closure in that their sickness is diagnosed. Rather than the diagnosis working as a single heroic narrative of progress, House's tricksterish interventions, the intractability of the body as bog, stretch psychic energy into a wider social movement.

In effect, the patient's final correct diagnosis comes to work as a metonym for a larger gnosis that is a partial individuation of the collective. Other characters make the repeating story formula a ritual because they individuate through its repeating patterns. For House the repetition is a circle that simply marks his psychic imprisonment. For him, the episodes are his incarceration in hell.

So what about the audience? In the end, it is we who have put House in hell. Only the audience can release him from his torment. Here at last, House is like Holmes. For Holmes died, perhaps as his only way to escape a similar narrative entrapment in stories that were beginning to stagnate into the psychic aridity of repetition. Holmes died and the audience brought him back. Conan Doyle could get away with his highly speculative re-writing of the disappearance of Holmes at the Reichenbach Falls only because the desire of the audience for the detective was greater than their need for plausibility (Doyle 1894).

House similarly can be saved only by the audience. By accepting House's end, either in the character's demise into insanity, or the simple cancellation of the series, he can be extracted from the (narrative) circles of hell. Or, another possibility is to work narratively on the bog in which he is drowning. So in the fifth series, House ends up in a mental hospital. Can anyone but he pluck a patient from the bog of the other into social and psychic rebirth? We shall see.

In the last analysis, there is no last analysis, for from the bog of Mother Earth come bodies whose marks can be interpreted in more than one way. Jung intuited that bogs and bodies were intimately related to the house of the human psyche. Gregory House is Jung but crazier and more tormented, a trickster who forces individuation onto others partly as a way of avoiding it himself. So House means chaos, which serves to productively stir up the social dialogues in the series and offer a space for the audience to imaginatively engage with them. On the other hand, House and *House* offer a very limited *diagnosis* and no *solutions* to social problems. While avoiding the conservative implications of Jung's house and psyche-home, *House* seeks to make the audience into the final detectives.

In the cave below the dream house, Jung perceived a society in which the bog, the matter/mater of earth and nature, was integrated into society. Ultimately, I suggest, Gregory House is one of our sacrifices to the bog, which is the unconscious, the body, earth and nature. We watch House in hell and hope to learn from him how not to go there. What his story seems to show, contrary to his loud protestations of adherence to rational science and desire to keep well away from messy patients, is that the bog sucks down those who deny her in fear and loathing. Patients are reborn from the bog by an openness to new narratives, new understandings of the 'other' as body.

House is really telling us how to be at home in our psychic house of the body. We can only be at home in the body when we understand it as metonymically connected to the bog of our primal mother, the earth. Our bodies fall into bogs, our bodies *are* bogs into which we fall. Rather than the detective myth of the search for the Holy Grail, *House* is built on the myth of rebirth from the earth. It implicates the audience so we may start to imagine our psychic house at home with nature. For then nature need not psychically engulf us like a bog. And more than the patient, society itself, may be reborn.

References

Botting, Fred (1995) *Gothic*, New Critical Idiom, London & New York: Routledge.

Doyle, Arthur Conan. (1892) 'A Scandal in Bohemia', in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, London: George Newnes Ltd.

----- (1894) 'The Final Problem', *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, London: George Newnes.

----- (1902) *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, London: George Newnes Ltd.

Freud, S. (1899/1976) *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Strachey, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Harrington, Ellen Burton (2007) 'Nation, Identity and the fascination with forensic science in Sherlock Holmes and *CSI*', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 10(3): 365-382.

Jung, C. G. (1963/1983) *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, London: Fontana.

Plain, Gill (2001) *Twentieth-Century Crime Fiction: Gender, Sexuality and the Body*,
Edinburgh University Press.

Rankin, Ian (1997) *Black and Blue*, London: Macmillan.

Rowland, Susan (2001) *From Agatha Christie to Ruth Rendell*, London: Palgrave.

Rowland, Susan (2010) 'The Wasteland and the Grail Knight: Myth and Cultural Criticism in
Detective Fiction', *CLUES: A Journal of Detection*, forthcoming.

Sayers, Dorothy L. (1926) *Clouds of Witness*, London: Collins.

----- (1930) *Strong Poison*, London: Collins.

Sophocles (429 BCE, 1984) *Oedipus the King*, trans. Robert Fagles, Harmondsworth:
Penguin.

Shore, David and Paul Attansio. (November 16th 2004) *House M.D.* Fox TV.

Shore, David. (2006) 'Developing the Concept', *Hulu.com. The Paley Center for Media*.
Accessed 27/07/2009.

© Susan Rowland 2009