

## AN ANALYSIS OF FEMALE EMPOWERMENT IN *ENOLA HOLMES 2*

Devanissa Kungzhunita Sevti<sup>1</sup>; Adria Vitalya Gemilang<sup>1,2</sup>; Isti'anutul Hikmah<sup>1,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>[kungzhunita179@gmail.com](mailto:kungzhunita179@gmail.com); <sup>2</sup>[adria.vitalya@ustjogja.ac.id](mailto:adria.vitalya@ustjogja.ac.id); <sup>3</sup>[istianatul.hikmah@ustjogja.ac.id](mailto:istianatul.hikmah@ustjogja.ac.id)

### Abstract

This article presents the portrayal of female empowerment in *Enola Holmes 2* (2022), focusing on how the main character's development reflects resistance to patriarchal norms in Victorian England. The aim is to examine how Enola's growth embodies feminist values through her actions and relationships. During research, the qualitative descriptive method is used. Abrams' (2015) theory of character development and Kabeer's (1999) empowerment framework are used to analyze the film, focusing on resources, agency, and achievements. The analysis reveals 13 data points related to Enola's character development: five on independence to collaboration, four on persistence to receptiveness, and four on growing social awareness. Four data points represent female empowerment: one for resources, two for agency, and one for achievements. The findings show that Enola's transformation supports the film's feminist message.

**Keywords:** *character development, Enola Holmes 2, female empowerment, feminism*

### INTRODUCTION

Literature, as one of the oldest forms of human expression, is closely tied to culture, ideology, and identity. Klarer explains that literature comprises imaginative texts that reflect and shape human experience, serving both as entertainment and as a medium of critique (Klarer 1). Within literature, character becomes one of the most essential narrative elements. Forster categorizes characters into "flat" and "round," asserting that round characters are those who grow and change throughout a story (Forster 75). Abrams and Harpham define a dynamic character as one "who develops through experience," in contrast to a static character who remains unchanged despite the plot's progression (Abrams and Harpham 48). These concepts are fundamental when analyzing narrative texts, including films that center on personal transformation and social resistance.

In the film *Enola Holmes 2* (2022), the main character undergoes a significant arc of development that reflects both personal maturation and growing political awareness. Set in Victorian England, the film follows Enola's efforts to establish her detective agency while confronting societal norms that restrict women's agency. This setting provides a useful framework for examining issues of gender, power, and autonomy. The protagonist, Enola, is initially portrayed as independent and self-reliant; however, as the plot unfolds, she becomes more receptive to collaboration and more attuned to systemic injustice. Her character development reflects a shift not only in behavior but in ideological stance, highlighting her journey from individual struggle toward collective empowerment.

To examine how this transformation reflects female empowerment, this research applies Kabeer's framework, which breaks empowerment into three interrelated dimensions: resources, agency, and achievements. Kabeer states that "empowerment refers to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied." (Kabeer 3). These dimensions will be used to analyze how Enola's personal growth, enabled by education, support, and courage, intersects with her increasing engagement in social issues. As Enola shifts from acting alone to aligning with others, especially working-class women like Sarah Chapman, the narrative illustrates how empowerment is not only individual but also deeply collective.

Previous studies on Enola Holmes and similar detective narratives have primarily examined feminist representation, genre adaptation, or historical accuracy. Rogers discusses how female characters in detective fiction challenge traditional gender norms through intellect and independence (Rogers 284), while Abrams emphasizes the narrative significance of character transformation (Abrams and Harpham 48). Halleck explores the representation of women in period films, noting how historical settings can be used to engage with contemporary feminist discourse (Halleck 112). However, much of the existing research focuses on either a static portrayal of empowerment or isolated achievements without a comprehensive integration of character theory and empowerment frameworks. This research addresses that gap by combining Abrams and Harpham's theory of dynamic character with Kabeer's three-dimensional model of empowerment. Through this dual-theoretical lens, the study provides a more nuanced analysis of Enola Holmes 2, positioning it at the intersection of literary character analysis and feminist socio-political critique, and offering novelty in illustrating how cinematic character growth can embody and advance collective empowerment.

## METHODOLOGY

This research employed a qualitative descriptive method as its primary design. This type of research is appropriate for investigating complex social phenomena, in this case, the representation of female empowerment through character development in a fictional narrative. Qualitative descriptive research aims to provide a detailed and contextual understanding of human experience through textual, visual, and verbal analysis rather than numerical data. Because the subject of the research is a literary-based visual text (*Enola Holmes 2*, 2022), this design was chosen to explore both character transformation and ideological content in depth. The research focuses on interpreting character behavior, emotional development, and power dynamics, especially as they relate to the empowerment of women in a patriarchal society.

The subject of this research is the dialogues in *Enola Holmes 2*. Dialogues were selected purposively, focusing on lines that explicitly or implicitly reflect empowerment processes and character growth. Sampling was purposive, ensuring that only dialogues central to the research objectives were included. Data collection involved watching the film repeatedly and transcribing significant lines spoken by the main character, Enola Holmes, and her interactions with key figures such as Tewkesbury, Sarah Chapman, Sherlock Holmes, and Eudoria Holmes. These transcriptions were then organized into thematic categories based on the theoretical framework, such as "resources," "agency," and "achievements" from Kabeer's model, and "dynamic change" from Abrams and Harpham's theory.

The data analysis techniques applied were interpretive and thematic. After transcription, dialogues were coded according to theoretical indicators and examined in their narrative and socio-political context. The steps included identifying representative dialogues, applying relevant theoretical codes (e.g., "power to," "power over," or "internal transformation"), and interpreting their significance within the film's broader social commentary. These procedures were arranged logically and documented to allow replication by future researchers. No statistical or computational tools were used, as the emphasis was on in-depth, qualitative interpretation grounded in literary and feminist theory.

Two theoretical frameworks were used to guide the interpretation of the data. The first is Abrams and Harpham's (2015) concept of character development, particularly their definition of the dynamic character, a figure who undergoes psychological, ideological, or behavioral change because of conflict and experience (Abrams and Harpham 48). This framework is valuable for tracing Enola's transformation throughout the narrative, from her initial independence and self-reliance toward greater interdependence, collaboration, and empathy. The analysis of Enola's shifting traits, decision-making patterns, and interpersonal relationships provides a foundation for understanding how personal growth unfolds within the story.

Building upon this, the second framework is Kabeer's (1999) theory of female empowerment, which conceptualizes empowerment as a process involving three interdependent dimensions:

- (1) **resources**, referring to the material, social, and intellectual assets individuals draw upon to make choices.
- (2) **agency**, or the ability to define goals and act upon them despite resistance; and

**(3) achievements**, the tangible outcomes realized from exercising agency.

By first identifying the stages and nature of Enola's character development, the study can then examine how these changes enable her to access resources, expand her agency, and achieve meaningful outcomes. This sequence allows for a layered analysis in which individual character growth is understood not only as a literary construct but also as a driver of empowerment within the socio-political context of the film.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this research are categorized into two main aspects: (1) character development of Enola Holmes, and (2) the representation of female empowerment. The data were identified through close reading of the film's scenes and dialogues.

### Enola's Character Development in *Enola Holmes 2*

Table 1. Enola's Character Development

No	Character Development (Abrams' 2015 Theory)	Results
1	Independent → Collaborative	5
2	Persistent → Openness	4
3	Naïve about the social system → Aware of social inequality	4
Total		13

The character development of Enola Holmes in *Enola Holmes 2* is categorized into three major shifts: from independence to collaboration, from persistence to openness, and from naive to social awareness. Out of the 13 total findings related to character development, five data points illustrate Enola's transformation from working alone to cooperating with others, particularly with Sherlock and her female allies. Four data points reflect her shift from rigid persistence to a more open and adaptable approach, showing emotional growth and maturity. The remaining four data entries indicate her transition from personal concern to social consciousness, especially as she becomes aware of the injustices faced by the match girls. These findings highlight Enola as a dynamic character whose evolving mindset and behavior are central to the film's narrative progression and its feminist message.

#### *From Independent to Collaborative*

Enola Holmes begins her arc with a strong desire for independence, shown in her opening monologue where she declares her intent to open a detective agency, join the ranks of great detectives, and be her brother's equal (*Enola Holmes 2*, 00:01:13–00:01:54). This reflects both personal pride and defiance against the Victorian norms that restricted women's professional roles.

My name is Enola Holmes. You may remember me... After solving my first case, I started a business. A detective agency. Open and ready for my first clients. I was going to join the pantheon of great Victorian detectives... And best of all, I would be joining my brother. I would be his equal. A detective in my own right, worthy of the Holmes name. (00:01:13–00:01:54)

As the case grows more complex, she realizes that equality is not just about matching another's status, but about mutual respect and shared agency. This shift is seen when she approaches Tewkesbury for help, admitting she has overlooked allies and treating him as an equal partner (01:23:00). This marks a key turning point in her character development, aligning with Abrams and Harpham's (2015) view of dynamic growth and Kabeer's (1999) idea of empowerment through equitable alliances.

**Enola** : "I need your help.. Don't make me repeat it may I come in? Firstly, I would like to apologize for so much. I have failed to see allies in plain sight. And I have-"  
**Tewkesbury** : "Enola. There's something I wish to say too."  
**Enola** : "Alright."

(01:23:00)

This evolution reflects her emotional maturity, as she learns to set aside her pride and acknowledge the value of allies. By admitting that she has “failed to see allies in plain sight,” Enola demonstrates self-awareness and humility, which mark a shift from her earlier defensiveness. Emotional maturity here means recognizing that asking for help is not a weakness but a form of strength rooted in trust and equality. This growth aligns with Abrams’ (2015) theory of dynamic characters who evolve through conflict and experience, as Enola moves from rigid independence toward openness and collaborative empowerment.

### *From Persistence to Openness*

Enola initially displays rigid persistence, repeatedly rejecting assistance when Sherlock offers help.

- Sherlock** : “Shoes a state. Hair’s not much better. You need to wash your clothes. You are pale-”  
**Enola** : “Stop!”  
**Sherlock** : “And there’s your fingernails. Why are you working in a match factory?”  
**Enola** : “What?”  
**Sherlock** : “Last night, they were dirty with green traces. This morning, they are black. The phosphorus from the match-making has mixed with oxygen. I wasn’t in such a state as to not see that.”  
**Enola** : “How did you-”  
**Sherlock** : “And your neck is red. Someone has gripped it or held a knife against... Are you involved in something dangerous? You are still my ward. If you need my help, my offer remains on the table. Don’t be so desperate to prove yourself, Enola.”  
**Enola** : [scoffs] “I’m not desperate, and I don’t need your or anyone’s help.”

(00:27:04-00:27:53)

This dialogue shows her determination to prove her capability. However, after being arrested and rescued by Eudoria, she receives advice that softens her stance. This moment marks a key emotional shift. This can be seen in the dialogue below.

- Enola** : “I need your help.. Don’t make me repeat it may I come in? Firstly, I would like to apologize for so much. I have failed to see allies in plain sight. And I have-”  
**Tewkesbury** : “Enola. There’s something I wish to say too.”  
**Enola** : “Alright.”

(01:23:00)

She becomes more open to guidance and support, acknowledging that independence does not exclude cooperation. This openness reflects her growing adaptability and marks a transition toward more balanced judgment.

### *From Naive to Social Awareness*

At the beginning of the film, Enola approaches detective work as an intellectual challenge, disconnected from broader social issues. Her belief that intelligence alone ensures success shows a limited worldview.

- Enola** : “... After solving my first case, I started a business. A detective agency.”

(Enola Holmes 2, 00:01:17-00:01:27)

Enola’s monologue at the beginning of the film reflects her naïve perception of detective work as a purely intellectual pursuit, detached from wider social realities. By confidently declaring the establishment of her detective agency, she demonstrates the belief that personal intelligence and ambition are sufficient for success. This perspective illustrates her limited awareness of the systemic barriers faced by women in Victorian society, where gender and class inequalities often determined one’s opportunities. Her optimism, though admirable, reveals a form of youthful idealism that ignores the oppressive structures surrounding her. In line with Kabeer’s (1999) framework, this stage highlights Enola’s lack of consciousness regarding the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities, underscoring her

initial naivety before exposure to social injustice broadens her understanding. However, when she uncovers the exploitation of match factory girls, her perspective changes. She recognizes the injustice in the system and asserts,

**Enola:** "The girl I'm looking for, Sarah Chapman, she has the proof that girls are dying from phosphorus they work with every day. And the factory are trying to cover it up as typhus. She knows it, and someone is going to kill her for it."

(01:24:20-01:24:36)

Enola's monologue reveals a decisive moment of social awareness, marking her shift from perceiving detective work as a personal endeavor to recognizing its broader political implications. By explicitly acknowledging the factory's cover-up of deaths caused by phosphorus exposure, she demonstrates an ideological awakening that moves beyond individual problem-solving. This awareness signifies her growing recognition that injustice is embedded within structural and institutional systems, rather than isolated in singular cases. In Kabeer's (1999) framework, this represents a progression from mere access to resources toward the development of agency, as Enola not only identifies the oppression of working-class women but also positions herself as an ally in their struggle. Simultaneously, the transformation illustrates what Abrams and Harpham (2015) describe as the hallmark of a dynamic character, one whose experiences and conflicts lead to meaningful psychological and ideological change. Enola's confrontation with systemic inequality, therefore, strengthens her character arc, showing her evolution into a socially conscious figure whose empowerment is tied to collective resistance.

## Concepts of Female Empowerment Represented in *Enola Holmes 2*

Table 2. Concepts of Female Empowerment

No	Concepts of Female Empowerment	Results
1	Resources	1
2	Agency	2
3	Achievements	1
Total		4

The findings show that female empowerment in *Enola Holmes 2* is represented through three dimensions based on Kabeer's framework: resources (1 data), agency (2 data), and achievements (1 data), resulting in a total of 4 data points. Resources appear when Enola gains limited but meaningful support from other female characters, such as Eudoria and Edith, which enables her to act decisively. Agency is more dominant, reflected in Enola's assertive decisions to pursue justice and confront institutional barriers. Achievements are evident in her success in exposing industrial corruption and contributing to the broader struggle of working-class women. These findings suggest that empowerment in the film is not only personal but also social, highlighting how individual growth connects to collective resistance.

### *Resources*

Kabeer (1999) defines resources as material, human, and social assets that enable individuals to make choices. In *Enola Holmes 2*, this is reflected in Enola's upbringing and education, which are rare privileges for women in Victorian society.

"My name is Enola Holmes. You may remember me... After solving my first case, I started a business. A detective agency. Open and ready for my first clients. I was going to join the pantheon of great Victorian detectives... And best of all, I would be joining my brother. I would be his equal. A detective in my own right, worthy of the Holmes name."

(00:01:13-00:01:54)

Her ability to open a detective agency is supported by the intellectual environment provided by her family, especially the influence of Eudoria, Sherlock, and Mycroft. These foundational resources equip Enola with the confidence and critical skills necessary to challenge gender norms. Figure 1 below illustrates a flashback where young Enola is taught by her mother Eudoria, through unconventional lessons that emphasize independence, intellectual growth, and resilience.



Figure 1. Eudoria teaching Enola

This upbringing becomes a vital resource that distinguishes Enola from other women in Victorian society, aligning with Kabeer's (1999) idea that resources, whether educational, social, or familial, form the basis of empowerment.

### *Agency*

According to Kabeer (1999), agency refers to the ability to define one's goals and act upon them, especially when this capacity is limited. It involves making strategic life choices and taking action through resistance, negotiation, or collaboration. In *Enola Holmes 2*, this appears in two forms: power over, seen when Grail uses the law through Lestrade to suppress Enola's autonomy, and power to, shown when Enola and the match girls unite to resist exploitation. These examples illustrate that agency is not only about individual defiance but also about collective empowerment.

**Inspector Lestrade:** "Enola Holmes, you're under arrest. Try to escape, and we will make this difficult."  
(1:04:00-1:04:04)

In contrast, power to is displayed through the collective resistance led by Sarah Chapman, supported by Enola and Bessie. The match girls' strike demonstrates how awareness and solidarity enable marginalized women to take strategic action, challenging oppressive systems and asserting control over their lives.

**Mr. Crouch** : "Get down!"  
**Enola** : "Let her speak!"  
**Sarah** : "A few weeks ago, Mae Izley, William, and I set out to prove something. To prove that this factory was killing people, and they knew it. But they decided that profit mattered than we did... It ain't typhus that's killing us. It's the phosphorus."  
**Bessie** : "What we work with every day."  
**Sarah** : "These were our friends, our sisters, and our children. Well, it stops now. It's time for us to use the only thing we have. Ourselves. It's time for us to refuse to work. It's time to tell 'em no. ... Well, will you join me?"  
 (1:53:42 – 1:55:05)

### *Achievements*

Kabeer (1999) views achievements as the outcomes resulting from the effective use of resources and agency. In the film, achievement is most clearly demonstrated when Enola and her allies successfully mobilize the match girls to protest against unsafe working conditions. Despite losing crucial legal evidence that could directly implicate Lord McIntyre, they refuse to surrender. Instead, they transform the resources they have, knowledge of the phosphorus poisoning, and solidarity among the workers into collective agency by organizing a strike.

**Mr. Crouch** : "Get down!"  
**Enola** : "Let her speak!"  
**Sarah** : "A few weeks ago, Mae Izley, William, and I set out to prove something. To prove that this factory was killing people, and they knew it. But they decided that profit mattered than we did... It ain't typhus that's killing us. It's the phosphorus."  
**Bessie** : "What we work with every day."

**Sarah** : "These were our friends, our sisters, and our children. Well, it stops now. It's time for us to use the only thing we have. Ourselves. It's time for us to refuse to work. It's time to tell 'em no. ... Well, will you join me?"

(1:53:42 – 1:55:05)

This strike marks a decisive achievement because it demonstrates how resources combined with agency produce real social outcomes. The factory girls' act of walking out together represents not only their refusal to be exploited but also the culmination of Enola's development, as her efforts now contribute to a larger victory. Thus, achievement in the film is portrayed not as individual success but as the collective triumph of marginalized women reclaiming their dignity and safety.

## CONCLUSION

This research concludes that *Enola Holmes 2* (2022) represents female empowerment through the dynamic development of the protagonist's character. Enola's transformation, from independence to collaboration, persistence to receptiveness, and naivety to social awareness, shows that empowerment is not a static quality but a continuous process shaped by experience, conflict, and social interaction. Using Kabeer's (1999) framework, the analysis reveals that Enola's access to education and upbringing function as essential resources that support her agency. Her ability to resist patriarchal domination and to mobilize others reflects her agency both as "power over" and "power to." Finally, the success of the match girls' protest illustrates achievements that extend empowerment beyond personal growth toward collective social change. These findings demonstrate that female empowerment in the film is not limited to individual self-determination but is constructed through solidarity, receptiveness, and shared struggle. Thus, *Enola Holmes 2* not only portrays the personal development of a young female detective but also provides a broader feminist narrative in which empowerment is realized through cooperation and resistance against structural inequality. The study contributes to feminist film analysis by showing how literary theory can be integrated with gender discourse to highlight women's agency and achievements in media representation.

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