

WHY SHERLOCK HOLMES IS IMMORTAL: CHARACTER AND LEGACY

By

Naveed Shadman Hossain
18103083

A thesis submitted to the Department of English and Humanities in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts in English

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Declaration

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

Student's Full Name & Signature:

Naveed Shadman Hossain

18103083

Approval

The thesis/project titled “Why Sherlock Holmes is Immortal: Character and Legacy” submitted by Naveed Shadman Hossain (18103083) of SPRING, 2019 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in English on 10th April, 2019.

Examining Committee:

Supervisor:
(Member)

Rukhsana Rahim Chowdhury
Senior Lecturer, English and Humanities
BRAC University

Program Coordinator:
(Member)

Full Name
Designation, Department
Institution

Departmental Head:
(Chair)

Full Name
Designation, Department
Institution

Ethics Statement

Abstract/ Executive Summary

Sherlock Holmes has been an endearing figure in the public consciousness for over a hundred years now. He has transcended the pages of the novel to become much more than Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the author, could ever have imagined. From faithful adaptations to whimsical cartoons and reimaged, gender-swapped retellings, Holmes has endured and will undoubtedly continue to endure. As media evolves, Sherlock Holmes too will evolve. This paper aims to break down the reasons for Holmes' initial surge in popularity in the Victorian Era, and also tries to see why a mere pop fiction is so beloved by readers and viewers alike to this day.

Keywords: *Sherlock Holmes; timeless; legacy; influence; society*

Dedication

I dedicate this to my very own Watson, Aaraf Afzal, for never giving up on me in my pursuit of storytelling and music. All the colours that I shine would be much dimmer without you, old friend.

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Introduction

Sherlock Holmes graced the literary world with his presence in 1887. Initially writing with the sole intent to earn pocket change after a struggling medical practice, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle soon found himself flabbergasted at just how popular the character had become. Over a hundred years later, Holmes has stood the test of time like few others, earning the title of the most portrayed fictional character in film and television. Even in 2019, the love for Holmes has not waned in the slightest, with the latest incarnation being two vastly different takes on the character: a 21st century Japanese woman, and a ridiculous caricature in a Christmas comedy.

This paper primarily aims to dissect the Sherlock Holmes stories in order to answer the questions of why this particular figure and the surrounding mythos has stood the test of time, and why the abstract concept of the great detective manages to keep marching forward with no signs of stopping. In doing so, there is scope to unearth something deeper about the human psyche, as many people and cultures across the world have adapted and transformed Holmes to fit in with their own traditions, whether it be in Russia (Приключения Шерлока Холмса и доктора Ватсона) or even Bangladesh (আমাদের শার্লক হোমস).

As there is much ground to cover for the task at hand, the analysis will be split into two major sections. Section A will aim to dissect the mythos to unearth what made the Sherlock Holmes stories so appealing in the first place. This will require a close reading of the original canon as well as taking history and context into consideration. In addition, biographical criticism will be utilized in order to draw out some details of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's real life experience(s) that led to the conception of his famous stories. Section B will take a macro look at the character in order to answer for his relevancy throughout the ages.

This section will be more analytical, even philosophical in its approach, and will utilize methodologies of deconstruction and Freudian psychoanalysis in order to test the claims that will be made. Hopefully, by the end of the entire discussion, a clearer image will have been painted of the great detective, his stories, legacy and everything that he entails.

SECTION A

Chapter 1

The Real Sherlock Holmes

'What one man can invent another can discover.'

-Sherlock Holmes, "The Adventure of the Dancing Men"

Sherlock Holmes. Just hearing that name irks a significant response from the average individual. It is a name that carries over a hundred years of legacy, belonging to one of the most recognizable characters in English literature and popular culture. When thinking of said character, perhaps the most common image that comes to mind is the infamous deerstalker cap and the tobacco laden pipe. It is imagery that has been very strongly embedded in the public consciousness for several decades, and is imagery that has roots in Victorian era London. Therefore, in order to properly understand the character, Victorian London is the most reasonable place to start.

Sherlock Holmes was brought to life by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, a man whose own life is perhaps as intriguing as the character that he created. Of course, Holmes was certainly not the first fictional detective that had graced the literary world. Generally, Edgar Allan Poe's C. Auguste Dupin is believed to hold that title, and he has been the mold from which later figures have been cut, including Holmes himself (Sova 162). Conan Doyle boldly stated that every one of Poe's stories is a root from which a significant amount of literature has developed, going on to ask quite the heavy handed question "Where was the detective story until Poe breathed the breath of life into it?" (Knowles 67). At the same time, Émile

Gaboriau's Monsieur Lecoq was also extremely popular during that era. Perhaps it will not be far fetched to claim that Holmes' speech and behaviour sometimes resemble Lecoq's.

Interestingly enough, both these characters, Lecoq and Dupin, are referenced at the beginning of *A Study in Scarlet*, and quite amusingly, made fun of by Holmes himself. However, while there are apparent similarities between Holmes and other characters in literature, there was also a very *non* fictional counterpart, a living breathing human being who very strongly inspired his creation. This individual was none other than Dr Joseph Bell, a surgeon at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh whom Conan Doyle met in 1877. Similar to Holmes, Bell was known for applying minute observations from which he was able to draw much broader conclusions (Lycett 53). In 1892, Doyle wrote, "It is most certainly to you that I owe Sherlock Holmes" ("Letter to Mr Bell about Sherlock Holmes"). In the same letter, he stated that he tried to construct a character around "the centre of deduction and inference and observation" which he had so often seen Bell inculcate, and in his 1924 autobiography Doyle remarked, "It is no wonder that after the study of such a character, I used and amplified his methods when in later life I tried to build up a scientific detective who solved cases on his own merits and not through the folly of the criminal" (Doyle, *Memories and Adventures* 36). Robert Louis Stevenson also noticed the striking similarities between the two, asking "...can this be my old friend Joe Bell?" (Stevenson).

Many fictional characters have been based on real people, so why is this particular iteration of individual to character so important to the topic at hand? The answer lies in the distance between reality and fiction. Generally, popular fiction, whether they be literature, film or everything in between, has always been more about marketing to the most common denominator, i.e there is generally a sacrifice of literary merit in exchange for higher return on monetary investment. What this means is that historically, popular fiction has served as a means of escapism to the masses, as the stories would be very plot driven with many twists

and turns to keep the readers' attention intact. Many of these stories relied upon fantastical, other worldly elements, such as Robert Loius Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. Of course, Doyle's stories of Holmes have nothing so extreme, that is until one considers the main character himself. Sherlock Holmes is, to put it bluntly, quite superhuman in his abilities. Just from some quick observations, he is able to put forth a detailed sketch of any human, animal or object, as evidenced by the majority of the canon. From deconstructing John Watson in *A Study in Scarlet*, to finding out the profession and history of James Mortimer from just a wooden cane in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, Holmes has continually proven throughout the stories to possess some abilities that the common man can only see as magic tricks. Conan Doyle's theatrical descriptions do not make such 'tricks' any less daunting from a realistic lens. It should then come as quite a shock when the reader learns of how Dr Joseph Bell was almost as every bit a magician as Holmes. In an entry in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, Edward Harnagel writes about Bell's "wizardry in diagnosis" of a stranger, whereby the doctor unearths an impressive amount of detail from just his observations and deductions (1159). In the same article, the author mentions what Bell's colleagues had to say: "He would tell [the patients] their symptoms, and even the details of their past life, and would hardly ever make a mistake" (Hanagel 1158).

Obviously, Bell was not correct a hundred percent of the time, but whatever he could do was quite extraordinary. Conan Doyle, working as Bell's outpatient clerk, saw these instances of brilliance on a regular basis. In his autobiography, the Doyle writes that after having seen the many unique traits of detective characters of the past, he wanted to bring his character's methods as close as possible to "an exact science". Doyle thus brings to light the crux of Holmes' initial burst in popularity. He boldly states that such methods were already proven to work in real life, and that readers would require examples of such brilliance, brilliance that he had witnessed time and time again from his old professor (Doyle, *Memories*

and Adventures 440). Can an argument then not be made of how, when reading about Holmes' exploits, the common man and woman could imagine themselves in his shoes, and that too without it being an outlandish thought? The magic that they witnessed in the pages was very well within their grasp; with diligent effort, they too could become the great detective themselves. Who else but Conan Doyle could be the perfect candidate to validate such a claim? He picked up much of Bell's methods in their time together, and in a famous case that took place outside the pages of the stories, Doyle used his skills to clear the name of Oscar Slater, an innocent man who had been framed for a crime he did not commit. Bell later wrote to his former student, "You are yourself Sherlock Holmes and well you know it" (Baring-Gould 8).

Chapter 2

A Brilliantly Flawed Protagonist

“So silent and furtive were his movements, like those of a trained bloodhound picking out a scent, that I could not but think what a terrible criminal he would have made had he turned his energy and sagacity against the law instead of exerting them in its defence.”

-John Watson, *The Sign of Four*

Over the course of history, the western literary canon has seen countless stories with countless characters. These tales have spanned over centuries, shaping and being shaped by the cultures and traditions of their own respective eras. As a general rule of thumb, there is usually at least one major character who the audience follows in order to understand the plot and the world in the narrative. When it comes to the Sherlock Holmes stories, this becomes a little trickier to pin down. Though they center around Holmes solving the many cases that come his way, it is actually Dr John Watson who narrates them to the reader. Perhaps some distinction can be made between the two and between what constitutes as ‘protagonist’ and ‘main character’. However, for the purposes of this discussion, the character of Holmes will be referred to as protagonist, seeing as he primarily drives most of the stories forward when there is a call to action.

To the average person, the term ‘protagonist’ can mean quite a plethora of things, but one can assume that one of the more common terms attached to it is ‘hero’. The most cliché imagery that can be constructed from said term is most likely the ‘knight in shining armour’ who saves the day and rescues the princess. As obnoxious as this may be, much of the elements involved here rings true. In Joseph Campbell’s work on comparative mythology, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, his main argument is that the archetypal hero that exists in

the mass consciousness is one who goes on a journey, faces obstacles and comes back home as someone who has grown, shedding away the ignorance of their past self (Campbell 30). For a hefty amount of fictional work, this can be a very legitimate summary of what the hero goes through. Whether it be Beowulf or Harry Potter, some form of self-growth and journey is involved and the characters are deemed as ‘good’. While Holmes is obviously not evil (he does work on the side of the law, after all), he certainly does not fall under the category of ‘completely good.’ Yes, a protagonist with flaws is one that is compelling, but many of Holmes supposed ‘flaws’ are rather alarming to say the least. He is no paragon of virtue and he definitely is not the knight in shining armor that saves the day because of his ‘strong moral compass’. The most straightforward reason as to why he does detective work can be best summed up by the character himself when he sordidly states that his mind is akin to “a racing engine, tearing itself to pieces because it is not connected up with the work for which it was built” (Doyle, *The Sign of Four*). This alone is his primary reason for being an investigator; not because he wants to serve and protect, but because he wants the thrill of the chase and to unravel the many knots that are left by those on the opposite side of the law.

The word ‘addict’ carries with it many negative connotations. It is also the word that can sum up Sherlock Holmes in an unbelievably succinct manner. Unless Holmes supplies his mind with challenging puzzles and problems to solve, he resorts to other means for that stimulation, i.e narcotics. In *The Sign of Four*, an equally exhausted and enraged Watson reprimands his companion quite harshly for his constant use of cocaine and morphine, imploring him to consider the consequences of losing “those great powers with which [he had] been endowed” (Doyle, *The Sign of Four*). It is here where Holmes reminds the reader of his abhorrence to the “dull routine of existence”, further iterating how his constant craving for mental exaltation has led him to create his own profession of the ‘consulting detective’ (Doyle, *The Sign of Four*). Although use of morphine and cocaine were not deemed as illegal

in the Victorian Era, the dangers surrounding abuse of the substance were quite well known by doctors in the medical field. Watson being the level headed companion that he was, fully understood the implications of using them, but alas Holmes' stubborn nature proved too much for even the good doctor. Fortunately, this aspect of his personality does not ultimately lead to anything permanently damaging.

The same, however, cannot be said for his many instances of disregard for others' emotions or well-being. While he has shown aptitude for gratitude and praise and genuine affection for those close to him, it is to many a stranger that Holmes has shown a blatant disregard of such affection. Nothing can be a better example of this than his affair with the housemaid in "The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton." In the story, Holmes is after a particularly vile criminal who revels in blackmail and emotional manipulation. For one thing, he disregards the law entirely in order to break into Milverton's house, an act that would most likely land him in jail. However, the contentious activity that should be alarming to most sensible readers is that of the housemaid. In his journey to learn about his target's home and habits, Holmes engages in regular flirting with one of Milverton's housemaids, culminating in him proposing to her and being 'engaged'. By the end of the case (and in subsequent stories), she is never brought up ever again. While this may be played for laughs, the psychological implications of manipulating a human being in order to achieve an ulterior motive must not be undermined. It is as if Holmes forgets that he is dealing with living, breathing individuals. It is as if he is reducing them to mere objects in just one of many "games" that he gets tangled up in. In "The Adventure of the Copper Beeches" there is a similar, albeit a very toned down, replication of this behaviour. To Watson, it appears that Holmes has shown considerable interest in a young female client, but to his disappointment, by the time the case is over, she is completely removed from Holmes' memory.

In “Psychoanalysis on the Main Character and Author of Sherlock Holmes”, Giovanni Mario comes to the conclusion that Holmes is a person who is selfish, self-destructive as well as a perfectionist (Mario 12). In the previous chapter, it was shown that Joseph Bell was used as a model for many of Holmes’ core characteristics, from observation skills to analytical abilities. What then of the negative, less ‘superhuman’ ones? What is the purpose of having a protagonist so fundamentally flawed in what would be considered basic human deficiencies? The answer lies in that word itself: protagonist. While Campbell’s theories of the hero’s journey fits with many myths and folklore of old, what makes the obsessive Victorian sleuth stand out is his very *lack* of growth. Watson, never shies away from highlighting his companion’s many negative traits. It bothers him to no end and over the course of the stories, the good doctor’s frustrations are felt on numerous occasions. These traits work so well for the character as they very firmly tether him to the land of the common folk. Obviously, not everyone is sneaking into other people’s houses at night, breaking off faux engagements, or injecting morphine into their veins. Yet there are many people who *do* end up doing such things; real human beings and real criminals that make the news every other day. Suddenly Sherlock Holmes is not the superhuman detective with amazing abilities. Suddenly Sherlock Holmes is someone who could be the beggar one passes on the street, or the shady looking fellow near the bus station. The two extremes of such a character that are such prevalent aspects of his personality not only make him an endearing figure to read, but tie him to both the land of the common as well as the land of the superhuman very, very firmly. An investigator who fights for good and does drugs: it sure does sound like an unforgettable figure, and if I dare say, it sounds like a figure whose id and superego are in a perpetual state of flux.

Chapter 3

Doctor Watson: More than a Companion

“It was worth a wound—it was worth many wounds—to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask.”

-John Watson, “The Adventure of the Three Garridebs”

The previous two chapters looked at the superhuman as well as surprisingly realistic sides of Sherlock Holmes in an attempt to answer why he, as a character, resonated so strongly with the readers of his time. However, Arthur Conan Doyle’s stories were not only about Holmes. Yes there were many mysteries, displays of superhuman intellect and unraveling of marvelous cases through very methodical steps. Yet one can argue (that too very strongly) that the success of Sherlock Holmes came not from the detective, but more so from the doctor, companion and best friend, Dr John H. Watson.

It is common knowledge that Dr Watson is the primary narrator of the stories. They are told through his point of view in the first person, and thus the reader gets a sense of the innermost workings of Watson’s own mind. This very fact may be something that the average person glosses over, but it can be argued that it was (and is) imperative in the massive success of the stories. Holmes as a character is very calculating; he is cold, methodical and his thoughts do not align with a regular person’s. Watson’s however, do. Not only is he a companion to the sleuth, but his character also serves as the audience surrogate. He is the ‘everyman’ who asks the questions that the reader will have and hence does not fully leave them in the dark. In the midst of bizarre adventures alongside a very mechanical protagonist, Watson is the average Joe who tries his best to bridge the gap between the world of mystery

and the world of the common man, i.e. the reader. Without him at the helm of the narrative, the stories would not nearly be as engaging. Amusingly enough, this is criticized very harshly by Holmes himself. The detective believes that his cases should not at all be treated as romanticized literature, but rather “in the same cold and unemotional manner” as the “exact science’ which he saw it to be (Doyle, *A Sign of Four*). Yet, the reader cannot help but side with Watson in this case, as the drama of storytelling is what grips them throughout the narrative from start to finish. It is interesting because Holmes himself took up the pen in a later story, that of “The Adventure of the Lion’s Mane”, which is not nearly remembered as much as the others.

Watson could subjectively be a good or bad narrator depending on who is being asked, but most do not know him as ‘the biographer of Holmes.’ Indeed, John Watson is best known for being the (more condescendingly) sidekick or (less condescendingly) best friend of the protagonist. Throughout the course of the original canon, Holmes is never seen to have many friends; most who know him does so in a very professional manner. Emotionally, he is detached, a side effect of having a mind that is akin to a fine tuned machine. His habit of berating those who cannot keep up with his rapidly altering thoughts leaves him with very few who are truly affectionate for him. As such, most of his early life saw him be surrounded by a looming sense of isolation. While this did not trouble him at all per se, the introduction of a roommate and eventual friend slowly transformed Holmes over the course of time. The formulaic nature of the cases does a fair job of hiding this fact, however a bit of perusing through some key moments definitely shines a light on this claim.

During their early days together, Watson and Holmes appear to be quite the formal gentlemen with one another. In the very first novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, the mystery of Holmes’ quiet nature draws in the doctor, and the walls of social etiquette stop him from intruding upon his housemate’s personal affairs. Holmes himself is as quiet and nonintrusive,

leaving Watson to his own devices. In time however, the reader soon finds Watson going from silent accompaniment in *A Study in Scarlet* to setting aside time from his family life to go solve mysteries, despite the always present risk to his own life (“The Boscombe Valley Mystery”). It is important to remember that despite this growing closeness, Holmes appears to look down upon and mock his companion on numerous occasions. However, this is perhaps more due to his habit of bluntly stating things just as they are, as opposed to any active desire to hurt. After all, in his world, objectivity rules above all else. Yet, in time, the cold, stern mask of the logician begins showing its cracks and Watson (as well as the reader) uncovers the existence of a warm, caring heart underneath. In “The Adventure of the Bruce Partington Plans” Holmes’ acknowledgment of Watson always staying by his side till the end leads the latter to see in his friend’s eyes something “which was nearer to tenderness” than he had previously ever witnessed (Doyle, “The Adventure of the Bruce Partington Plans”). “The Adventure of the Three Garridebs” sees a moment that is fueled with even more intensity and emotion. After Watson is shot, Holmes shows more worry and compassion in that brief moment than during any other throughout the entire canon. Watson writes of how his companion’s eyes were dulled and his lips were quivering. So moved was the doctor by this blatant show of worry and affection that he states it was “worth many wounds—to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask” (Doyle, “The Adventure of the Three Garridebs”). These two are but extreme instances of the affection shown by Holmes to his close friend, but peppered throughout the stories are little moments that show not only his affection, but admiration and respect as well. “The Adventure of the Speckled Band” sees Holmes claim his companion as being “invaluable” to him (Doyle, “The Adventure of the Speckled Band”). Then again, in “The Adventure of the Devil’s Foot”, after a harrowing experience, Holmes almost pleadingly asks his friend if he will see the adventure through to the end (Doyle, “The Adventure of the Devil’s Foot”). An interesting example takes place in

“The Adventure of the Dying Detective”. In this story, Holmes pretends to be delirious and in agony, so as to lure his target into a false sense of security. While in this state, he shares some very harsh words with Watson, if only to stop him from coming too close. The poor doctor is “bitterly hurt” but in the resolution of the tale, Holmes asks Watson if he believes that the detective has “no respect for [his] medical talents” (Doyle, “The Adventure of the Dying Detective”). Clearly, Holmes knows that with a cursory glance at his figure from up close, Watson would undoubtedly have discovered his ploy, and the whole mission would have been thrown into jeopardy. In his own, unusual way, the detective shows his respect for Watson’s own talents as a professional in his field.

Sherlock Holmes is superhuman with his abilities and interesting with his flaws, but with John Watson, he is above all, human. For the mechanical mind to possess the heart of a man elevates not only his own character, but also the character of he who softens that heart in the first place. Perhaps, above all else, this was the piece of Doyle’s stories that truly stayed with the readers of Victorian London. As loud as the claim can be made that the mysteries kept drawing the readers in, maybe behind it all, a more subconscious reason that tied everything together was their expectations of tales of friendship, of heart and mind complementing one another to shed light upon said mysteries. Even in the chronologically final story, the two old friends still share that same spark for the love of adventure and of one another. As Holmes says, “Good ol’ Watson. You are the one fixed point in a changing age.” (Doyle, “His Last Bow”).

SECTION B

Welcome to the 21st century. The industrial revolution and subsequent World Wars have changed the landscape of humanity entirely. Gone are the days of Victorian Era London and in their place is a never before seen age of globalization. The world is moving at a breakneck speed, with streams of information connected like never before. Data is gushing from one point of the planet to another, leading to cultures being ever so increasingly homogenized, and fads are dying as quickly as they are being born. What a tumultuous time to live in; blink and one can find themselves in a state they have never been in before.

But what is this, *another* adaptation of Sherlock Holmes? Surely it must be one of only a handful. Surely, Victorian Era London cannot be *that* enticing a setting for the people of the modern world. Ah, but there lies the point of interest. Sherlock Holmes has been constantly adapted into different media, going through the motions again and again and again. He has been an action hero (*Sherlock Holmes*, 2009), a drug addict (*The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*, 1976 and *Elementary*, 2012), a diagnostician (*House*, 2004), a 21st century Japanese woman (*Miss Sherlock*, 2018), a cartoon dog (*Sherlock Hound*, 1984), and has even found himself to be reanimated in the 22nd century (*Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century*, 1999). Surely, some questions must be being raised at the moment, and this section will attempt to bring those into focus.

Chapter 4

Is it not Human to Question?

“Here I had heard what he had heard, I had seen what he had seen, and yet from his words it was evident that he saw clearly not only what had happened, but what was about to happen, while to me the whole business was still confused and grotesque.”

-John Watson, "The Adventure of the Red Headed League"

Religion, philosophy and science; as of 2019 these three terms each carry an immeasurable amount of weight. While at a glance, they appear to be quite different from one another (with religion and science butting heads on various occasions), it should not be too difficult to think of the single thread that connects them. This thread is of course man himself, or to be more precise, man's rather inherent desire to make sense out of the world, to extract some semblance of meaning from the chaos that is the universe. How many systems of faith have been implemented since the birth of the human race, and how many individuals have claimed to have found the "perfect" system of life? Indeed from Buddha to Plato, Christ to Confucius it appears that mankind has always yearned for ways to look at the world around them and say "This is what is actually going on; this is what we should do." Then, out of the shadows, it appeared that science shot forward, knocking the two groups aside, yelling "No! *This* is what is actually going on."

Amusing as the imagery may seem, it is imperative to look at the human being in as objective a manner as possible. Ask almost any average individual whether they believe humans are different from animals, and the general consensus will most likely be a resounding 'yes'. Much can be said about the topic and research uncovers interesting new

information every other day. For the sake of brevity, however, let the discussion observe two major traits that make man what he is. Firstly, the human being has a terribly high degree of self awareness: he knows that he is an entity unto himself, separate from the environment and other individuals. Second, he has the ability to juggle ideas about realities outside of his immediate present moment, with the added bonus of communicating those ideas with other members of the species with relative ease. This leads to the crux of the discussion: the human being's ability to ask "why". As innocuous a trait as this may appear to be, it can be strongly argued that man's capacity for language and his ability to look around him and ask questions has led to the very fabric of faith, philosophy and science. Indeed that is a bold claim, and indeed it is bound to anger many; unfortunately arguing in detail is beyond the scope of the current discussion. What the discussion *does* tackle, however, is the importance of human curiosity and how it has been crucial in the development of his species across the centuries.

So, why be curious? The most obvious answer that comes to mind is to be able to learn something, or more formally, in order to gain information. Most living organisms of the higher order tend to have a certain level of cognition that allows them to do so. After all, it would be terribly inefficient to function without being informed of one's surroundings and the possible sources of food/prey. However, human cognition is different. Daniel Berlyne, in his 1967 paper titled "Curiosity and Exploration", defines "epistemic curiosity" as that which applies predominantly to humans. It is the ability to acquire information in the form of "ideational structures" that lead to "internal symbolic responses" which can guide behavior in the future (Berlyne 31). In simple terms, it basically means to obtain information so as to get a better sense of the world for future actions, a good example being a child burning his finger on a hot stove not doing so again. This all may sound rather basic when looked at a microscopic level, and in a way it perhaps is. What happens then, when one is presented with an entire species stumbling around constantly learning to better survive? A leader is needed.

To use the term “leader” is perhaps the most apt way to shine a spotlight on this particular figure, but there is more to it than just that. Humans are, undoubtedly, social creatures, and societies need proper cohesion in order to function without falling apart. This has been true for as long as man has existed and the “leader” has been a guiding figure throughout. For the discussion at hand, the type of leader that needs to be looked at are primarily the ones that quell human curiosity, and who so better than the religious, philosophical and scientific ones? There is no doubt that people have idolized these beings throughout human history, and rightfully so. The early human being, looking wide eyed at the unforgiving, chaotic world around him would naturally gravitate towards a figure who would tell him what is going on. When the human heard that the earth was in the center of the universe, or that he was made in the image of the most perfect being in the universe, it gave his mind some much needed comfort, and the drive to carry on determined. Then, as technology and understanding marched on, the authority on what to do increasingly became shared between the groups who thought and the groups who experimented. Today, the image of Albert Einstein is arguably as well-known as that of Jesus Christ. In modern times, the human being starved for spiritual answers head towards churches and mosques, while those starved for technical answers head towards universities and laboratories. Both are very important to the human being, as one assures him on how his universe works in the present moment and the other assures him on how his universe will work after his death.

Perhaps the reader cannot be blamed for forgetting that the paper concerns the detective, Sherlock Holmes. The time has come to tie everything that has been said above to this fictional figure who has, to reiterate, countless adaptations spanning through time. Sherlock Holmes is a detective, an extraordinary one to say the least. When the police themselves need help, they come to him, such as in the case of *A Study in Scarlet* and “The Six Napoleons”. When ordinary humans in need of guidance need help, they too come to

him. What do these groups seek? *Answers*. Holmes, with out of the box thinking, unorthodox methods and relentless pursuit of the criminal puts the clients and police force at ease. Much like ordinary humans looking to religious and scientific figures for guidance, the figures in Doyle's stories see Holmes the same way. More often than not, he preserves his reputation as he cracks open the numerous cases that come his way. The readers and viewers who are witnessing the stories unfold also cannot help but be hooked on from beginning to end because of the innate curiosity they possess. This is arguably a very large reason as to how Doyle retained interest in so many readers. It could very well be the same reason why the umpteenth adaptation of Holmes still draws in such large crowds; the appeal of a figure holding answers will always be a timeless concept, whether it be in 4000 B.C.E or the postmodern era of the 21st century.

This chapter has come to an end with the rather simple conclusion that humans crave for answers and the Holmesian figure constantly supplies it to them. However, there have been countless detective stories throughout the ages, with varying degrees of success and adaptations. A worthy name is that of Agatha Christie's Poirot. Yet, Holmes is the name that is most remembered. Why? The answer lies just behind Holmes himself: within the character of Dr John Watson.

Chapter 5

Psychoanalyzing Companionship: Opposite Ends of a Unified Mind

'Nothing clears up a case so much as stating it to another person.'

-Sherlock Holmes, "Silver Blaze"

In 2015, a movie titled *Mr. Holmes* was released, starring Ian McKellen as the eponymous character. The plot sees a 93-year-old Holmes struggling to recall the details of his final case before his mind fully deteriorates. To anyone familiar with the Sherlock Holmes mythos, much sympathy will be felt for the once spry and energetic character as he desperately tries to hold on to what little faculties of his mind that remain. Age has made him its latest victim, and he is ultimately a pitiful shadow of his former self. Yet, perhaps what is even more tragic than that is the knowledge that when the plot begins, Holmes and Watson have been estranged for years; companions who were akin to brothers, now completely cut off from contact. The once great detective's loneliness and sense of isolation is a central theme that carries the story forward, and Watson's absence is felt like a mist pervading through the entire narrative from beginning to end.

There it is once more: Sherlock Holmes, both as story as well as character, is incomplete without Watson. Over the years, the good doctor has been adapted in as colorful a manner as Holmes himself, from the bumbling fool of Nigel Bruce in *The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (1939), to Martin Freeman's sardonic, yet capable military man in *Sherlock* (2010), to even Kanjiya Shihori's nurturing and oddly adorable Wato-san in the Japanese

Miss Sherlock series (2018). Dr John Watson is arguably as integral to the mythos as Holmes himself. Chapter 3 touched upon the character's importance both as an audience surrogate and as a good counterbalance to the mechanical mind of the detective. This chapter will serve as an extension to what was discussed previously, and instead of merely putting Holmes and Watson on opposite ends of a spectrum, it will also attempt to unearth why readers and audiences have always gravitated to this particular companionship so strongly, regardless of media shifts and adaptations.

Sherlock Holmes, as previously described, is not quite the paragon of virtue. His erratic behaviour causes much trouble to not only Watson, but also their housekeeper, Mrs Hudson. Whether it be drug abuse, lack of proper food and rest, or their lodgings in utter disarray, Holmes presents himself as a near unstoppable force of nature when his moods go from one extreme to the next. Watson, however, appears to sit at the opposite end of the spectrum. Coming from a military and medical background, he stands in stark contrast to his companion's chaos, introducing much needed order in Holmes' life. However, in between them sits a very powerful love of adventure and all that is unknown. Holmes himself remarks in "The Adventure of the Reigate Puzzle" that Watson shares his love of "all that is bizarre and outside the conventions and humdrum routine of everyday life" (Doyle, "The Adventure of the Reigate Puzzle"). Neither the detective nor the doctor can ignore the call to adventure, and must work together in a well balanced, synchronized manner if they are to come out unharmed. To make a very bold assertion, perhaps it can be stated that in an abstract manner, the three figures in this scenario, i.e Holmes, Watson and adventure, represent the id, superego and ego respectively.

To briefly summarize, Sigmund Freud's theories of the psychic apparatus involves the three aforementioned agents. According to him, the id is the instinct driven part of the brain that knows no order and only serves to fulfill every little base desire that arises (Freud, 105).

The superego, more popularly understood as the ‘conscience’, represents adherence to cultural rules, and their application for proper guidance in society (Schater 481). The ego “attempts to mediate between id and reality” (Freud 110) in order to come to a satisfying conclusion that satisfies both the id as well as the superego. So how do Holmes and Watson factor into this?

Holmes has proven time and time again to be a very impulsive individual. Though rationality is his forte, and though he has exercised dedication that neared superhuman levels, these characteristics all line up neatly with his constant, one true goal, i.e to not be bored. In “The Musgrave Ritual” Watson even remarks upon a series of bullet patterns on the wall adorned by Holmes to form the initials “VR”, those of queen Victoria Regina. The doctor even follows this description with a dry, sarcastic remark on how neither the room nor the atmosphere had been improved with its addition (Doyle, “The Musgrave Ritual”). Whether it be cocaine abuse, breaking a stranger’s heart or firing a gun in an uncontrolled indoor environment, it has been made abundantly clear that Sherlock Holmes’ primary desire is to always meet his immediate needs of mental stimulation, regardless of the consequences. These are traits that align very well with the idea of the id.

Now let us observe John Watson. In the original canon, not only is Watson a medical man, but he is a retired army surgeon. Undoubtedly, Watson brings bits and pieces of that life into 221B Baker Street, and it is most evident whenever he interacts with Holmes. When he is not with his companion investigating crime scenes, Watson can be seen playing the role of a caretaker, trying his best to keep Holmes’ outbursts in line (to varying degrees of success of course). In more than one instance, if not for the doctor, Holmes would be in grave danger, such as in “The Adventure of the Devil’s Foot”. Here Holmes’ curiosity leads him to lighting a fatal hallucinogenic substance. If not for Watson’s presence of mind, both would have undoubtedly lost their lives. This is of course, during the midst of a case. When in the

comfort of Baker Street, Watson chides his partner for activities ranging from temper tantrums to usage of narcotics. As mentioned previously, in *The Sign of Four*, he severely reprimands his friend, asking him to consider how much he is putting on the line for a passing pleasure (Doyle, *The Sign of Four*,). Evidently, with his predisposition to maintain stability and structure, Watson's character resonates with that of the superego, standing opposite to Holmes' id. But what of the ego?

While it can be tempting to argue that Watson himself represents the ego, as he quite literally tries to contain and control Holmes' erratic tendencies, perhaps another point of view could provide a valuable insight. What if the idea of adventure and mystery is taken as the 'ego' figure? Understandably, it may sound unusual and a little counterintuitive at first glance. However the ego is meant to satisfy the desires of the id within the confines set by the superego, giving both parties a common goal to be tethered to. Both Holmes and Watson, the id and superego figures, find joy and fulfillment in the bizarre and mysterious cases that come by their doorstep. In "The Adventure of the Red-Headed League", Holmes proudly states that his companion shares his same love of unusual things that break the monotony of everyday life (Doyle, "The Adventure of the Red-Headed League"). Watson and Holmes argue and bicker over many things across many different iterations of the characters. Yet, every single time the common thread that keeps them in balance is their deep seated fascination and resolution to see a case from beginning to end. Both Watson's need for order, and Holmes' need for mental stimulation are thus satisfied, and throughout the decades, this has kept them close in the face of innumerable oddities.

Today, when faced with a thousand different stories of friendship across multiple mediums of art and storytelling, Holmes and Watson continue to shine on. If one is to go by Freud's model of the psychic apparatus, the brilliant dynamics of the two and their adventures strike at the core of the human being. Maybe in some subconscious way, the

individual reading the story or watching the movie sees shades of their very being being represented through a close friendship (id and superego) and a love of adventure (ego). This dichotomy of course, is not only limited to the detective duo. In many modern works of film and television, a variation of this can be seen in the 'good cop/bad cop' pairs, where one is usually a more passionate, hot headed individual, while the other is more reserved and patient in his demeanor. So, whether it is Victorian London or the 22nd century, Holmes and Watson's companionship will undoubtedly carry on as a shining example of friendship in literature and media for centuries to come.

Chapter 6

A Timeless Superhero

“I trust that age doth not wither nor custom stale my infinite variety.”

-Sherlock Holmes, “The Adventure of the Empty House”

Look up at the sky! Unfortunately it is neither a bird, nor a plane, and sadly it is not Superman either. What it *is* however, is Marvel Studios’ revenue climbing upwards with no signs of slowing down. The past decade has undoubtedly pampered fans of multiple pop culture properties quite well. From Marvel and DC comics’ adaptations on the big screen, to Star Wars seeing a new breath of life after a long hiatus, and even to the unexpected success of many television shows such as *Game of Thrones*, there has never been a better time to be a fan of such media. Among these, perhaps the one that has garnered the most success is concept of superheroes on the big screen. Marvel laid the groundwork for well made, long running film franchises, and others have tried (to varying degrees of successful) to emulate it for themselves. In a manner of speaking the current era is a rebirth of the superhero genre. They truly have leapt out of the pages of the comics and onto the big screen. However, the *idea* of superheroes is not all that new. For argument's sake, Sherlock Holmes could be thought of a superhero as well, and hopefully it will not take too much convincing to give validity to that claim.

The image that one conjures in their minds when they hear the word ‘superhero’ is most likely that of Superman, majestic cape and all. However, as the years have gone by, the concept of the superhero has become a lot more malleable. The unyielding integrity of

Spider-Man or the ruthless tactics deployed by Batman both make for very compelling characters. However, what most do not realize is that the ‘superhero’ figure has been there in the human consciousness for a long time. The word itself dates back to 1899 (Merriam-Webster), but the concept ties back into Joseph Campbell's *Hero with a Thousand Faces*, where he lays the groundwork for the ‘hero's journey’, as mentioned in the first chapter. The idea of a hero, someone greater than the average man, has existed as far back as the stories of Hercules. In the modern landscape, this idea has merely changed its outer appearance, transforming from ‘hero’ into ‘superhero’. This is quite amusing, as initially the ‘super’ represented the possession of superhuman abilities, but as the times neared the post-modern age, the high fantasy elements of flight or superhuman strength found their spaces to be shared more and more with elements that appeared to be a lot closer to reality. For example, Batman is only a regular human being, possessing abilities that are all attainable by a regular human being. Regardless, this concept of the superhero has been put in the forefront of the public consciousness, making it the newest vessel of the heroic archetype. So, how does Sherlock Holmes factor into this?

Sherlock Holmes, or rather the idea of Sherlock Holmes works surprisingly well in this scenario. For one thing, he is definitely on the side of the law; that appears to be the number one criteria for being a superhero. Though he may display questionable behavior, he has proven to be morally superior in his decisions on more than one occasion. Returning once more to his questionable actions in “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton”, the reason Holmes breaks into the man’s house is only because he (and the reader) fully understands how horrid Milverton is, in addition to being untouchable by the legal system itself. Holmes purposefully throws himself in harm’s way, putting his life and career on the line, in order to retrieve documents that would otherwise allow Milverton to carry out the heinous crime of blackmail. He states himself how there exist some crimes that “law cannot

touch” (Doyle, “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton”), showing that somewhere behind the machine, really does lie the heart of gold Watson keeps alluding to. Yet, what is a superhero without a supervillain, or arch nemesis? Superman has Lex Luthor, Spider-Man has the Green Goblin, and Batman has the Joker. What of the supposed superhero that is Sherlock Holmes? Enter professor James Moriarty.

To his misfortune, the professor only appears in one Holmes story, “The Final Problem”, and is merely mentioned in passing in another (*The Valley of Fear*). However, even with only one short story seeing him as a prominent figure, he is forever remembered by the readers, as that story was the very one where Holmes gives his life fighting against Moriarty to the bitter end. The champion sleuth can not be beaten by any old criminal, no. It requires, as Holmes put it, the “Napoleon of crime”, a criminal with the level of intellect as Holmes himself, to defeat the greatest detective in London (Doyle, “The Final Problem”). From a crude, elementary point of view, Holmes, Watson and Moriarty can very well represent superhero, sidekick and supervillain. Indeed many probably see it that way, even if there are many more layers to the equation than meets the eye at first glance.

Recent adaptations raise Moriarty to even greater heights and always find a way to make him the ultimate villain in all of them. Much like the many versions of Holmes and Watson, there exist a wide variety of professor James Moriarty, from an unassuming female therapist (*Miss Sherlock*, 2018) to a bisexual, sociopath with sudden bursts of rage (*Sherlock*, 2010). Holmes and Moriarty, detective and criminal, superhero and arch nemesis, whatever they are looked as, there is no understating just how vibrant the dynamics are between the two. One superhuman genius in the story makes it interesting enough, but with another, that too standing in his way, will always serve to bring back readers and audiences from all walks of life.

Conclusion

In the current cultural zeitgeist, Sherlock Holmes can find the perfect grounds for relevancy. It is always interesting to see how different writers spin the character's motivations while keeping him on the side of good. In BBC's 2010 *Sherlock* series, for example, the character's immoral nature is heightened to an almost terrifying extent. He states that while he is on the "side of the angels", he should not be considered as one himself (Thompson), clearly indicating his blatant lack of human empathy. This is where the shortcomings of the original canon play to the strength of the adaptations. A character arc is the transformation of a character through the course of a story (Gerke 79), and Holmes does not have an overtly noticeable one in Conan Doyle's writings. His character thus remains more or less flat throughout the course of the stories. What many of the non canonical writers attempt to do is give their version of the character a coherent journey, one of growth. The Holmes from *Sherlock* has to learn empathy and come to grips with a past trauma, the Holmes from *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* has to learn how to cope with the devastating effects of drug abuse, and the Holmes of *Miss Sherlock* has to learn to accept that she does seek comfort in friendship and genuine human affection. While Holmeses can come in many shapes and sizes (and genders!), the adventures, friendships and rivalries will forever be what makes a Sherlock Holmes story special. Whether it be Conan Doyle's original sixty stories, or someone trying their hand at taking the character a brand new direction, Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson will always be ready to accept readers, listeners and viewers with open arms.

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